



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

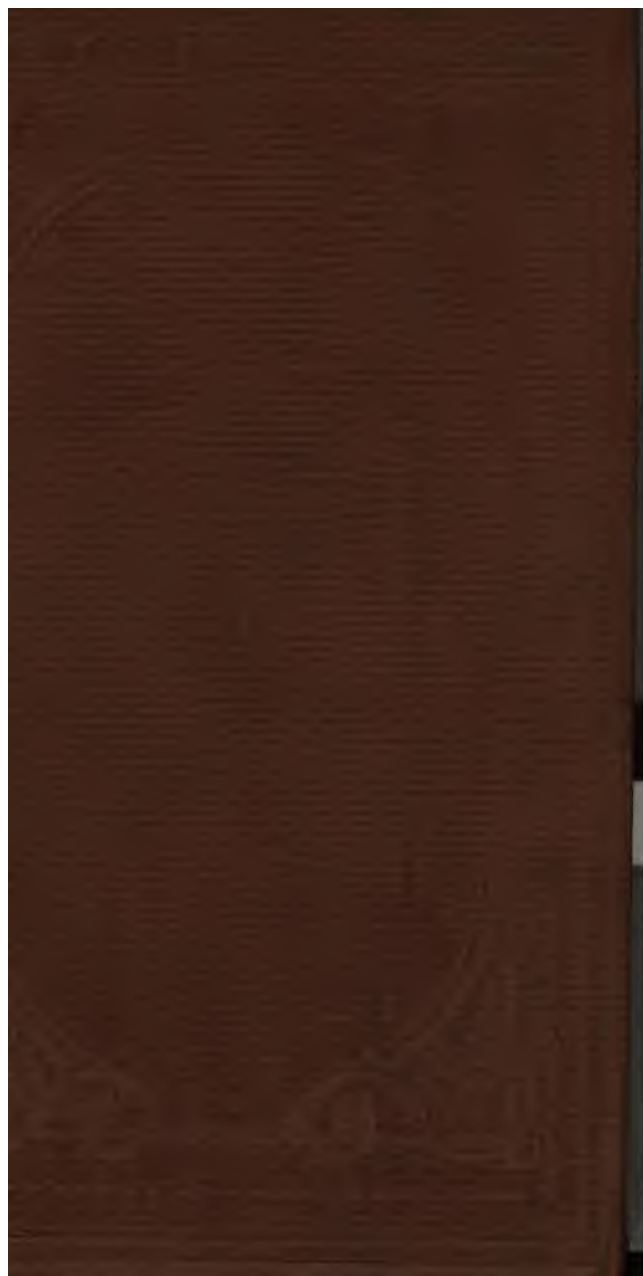
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





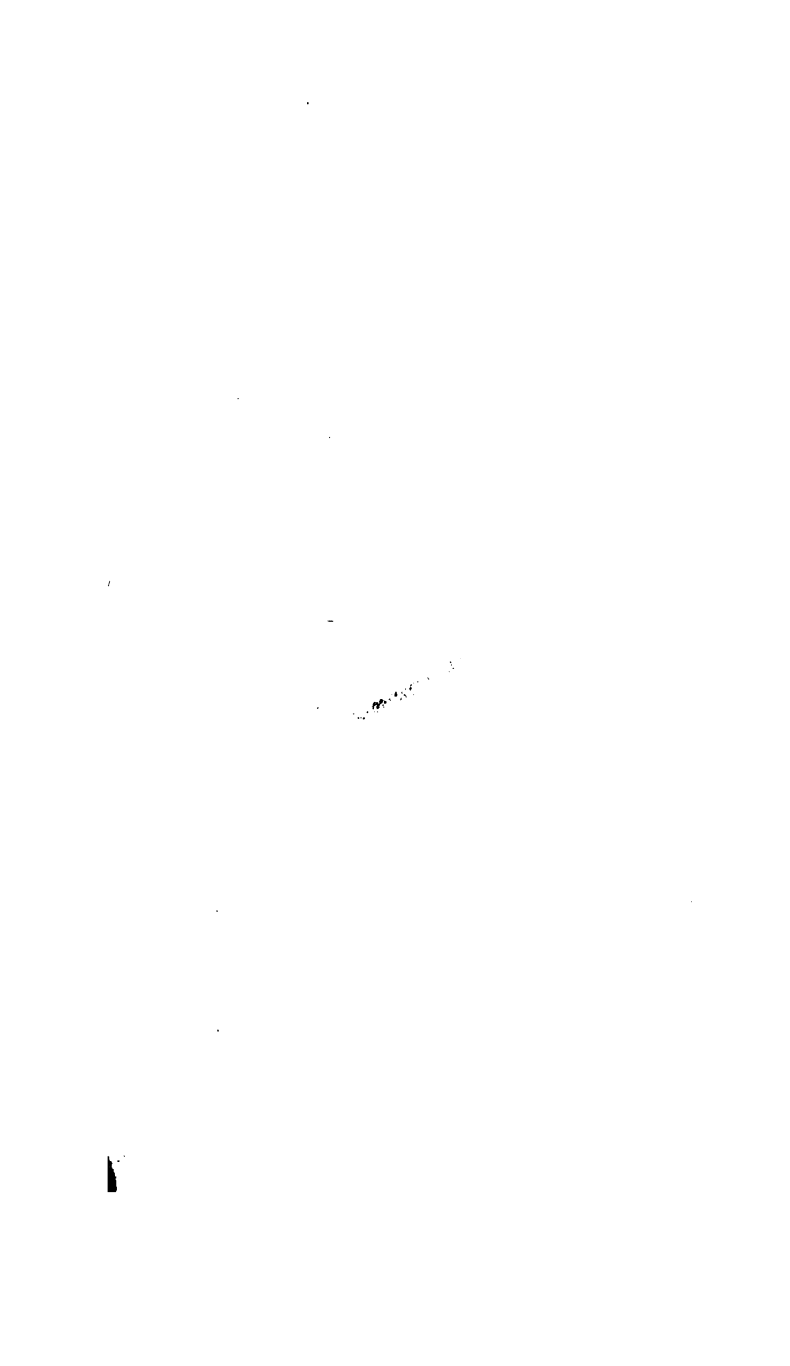
600052880T





DAWN AND TWILIGHT.

A TALE.



DAWN AND TWILIGHT.

A TALE.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "AMY GRANT," "TWO HOMES," &c.

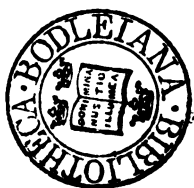
"Did we but see,
When life first opened, how our journey lay
Between its earliest and its closing day;
Or view ourselves, as we one time shall be
Who strive for the high prize,—such sight would break
The youthful spirit."—S.

VOLUME II.

OXFORD AND LONDON
JOHN HENRY AND JAMES PARKER.

M DCCC LVIII.

249. C. 352.



PRINTED BY MESSRS. PARKER, CORN-MARKET, OXFORD.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

PART II.—*continued.*

CHAPTER V.

A First Visit to Gainsworth.—“One Half of the World knows not how the other Half lives.”

CHAPTER VI.

London again.—How well one Wound was healed.—“Spring Flowers.”—Where did he get that Face?

CHAPTER VII.

The poor Sedgeleighs.—A Wedding-day.—“Not half so pleasant as she expected.—One reason for despising the World.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Whistle;—not for want of Thought.—All right again.—Building up the Bar:—Safety! Breaking it down:—Happiness!

CHAPTER IX.

Eyes begin to open.—Constance counts her Jewels.—Clouds.

CHAPTER X.

It comes at last.—Great Joy is very near to great Sorrow.

CHAPTER XI.

It is over at last.—A Tour up the Rhine.—Spring Flowers again. Spring-time everywhere.

CHAPTER XII.

Eustace.—He buries his Jewels.—A painful Discovery.—Must all be given up?—Mrs. Lester's Niece.

CHAPTER XIII.

Back to Elvanlees.—Clara hears about Constance.—Constance and Eustace say "Good-bye."—Gerard is compelled to perform an unpleasant Duty.

CHAPTER XIV.

Constance and Clara become Friends.—Clara tells her History.—The unseen Portrait.—Constance's Horror of the Original.

CHAPTER XV.

Gerard returns.—A visit to Ulresford Abbey.—Foreboding.—The Portrait again.

CHAPTER XVI.

Constance looks at the Portrait.—A dark Night.—A darker Morning.—Farewell for ever!

CHAPTER XVII.

Constance lies between Life and Death.—Gerard's lonely Walk.—He sees Clara.—Mr. Montrevor and Gerard meet and part.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Lily lifts its head.—The Father and Child.—Constance tells what Sickness has taught her.—It is harder to live than to die.—Clara helps Constance.—Rest for the Wanderer.

CHAPTER XIX.

An Anniversary.—Eustace and Percy see Constance again.

CHAPTER XX.

Eustace departs.—What Gerard did.—The new Church at Gainsworth.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

Percy has news from Elvanlees.—Constance is alone.—A Scheme for a New Life.—Opposition. Discussion. Agreement.—Constance goes to Gainsworth.

CHAPTER II.

Settling.—Work.—A little Light in great Darkness.—Constance returns to Elvanlees.

CHAPTER III.

Christmas at Elvanlees.—The Christmas Visitor.—Percy and Ada.—A Wedding.—Return to Gainsworth.—The Characters of Eustace and Constance discussed.

CHAPTER IV.

The End of all.—The last Meeting.—The last Parting.—“In the evening-time there shall be light.”



CHAPTER V.

"Lazarus is at the gate, *thou know'st it not*,
Or, ah ! too well I know thy heart would bleed,
Howbeit used on gentle thoughts to feed ;
But wall'd about with blessings is thy lot,
While dark winds prowl without, and are forgot."

THOUGHTS IN PAST YEARS.

"OH, how the wind does howl to-night! I'm a'most perished with cold."

"Let me put a bit more coal on, mother."

"No, no, child; what's the use? if it's all gone to-day, we shall be starved outright to-morrow. And somehow I don't feel as if anything would warm me; it's my heart that's cold and froze, I'm thinking, and I never heard tell of anything as would warm that." And as the old woman who was the speaker finished her sentence, she swayed her body backwards and forwards, and drew the stool on which she was seated nearer the fire. "I hate this place, Jenny," she went on: "no good has ever come to us since we came to it. It's twelve years come Candlemas since we came, —twelve weary years they've been to me. Ah, when your uncle wrote and told us of the fine wages we'd all get if we'd travel up to Gainsworth, and the work there was for the childer and all, your poor father and I thought it would be a fine thing to come. Ten little ones you were then, ten as likely childer as ever I see, though it's I your mother as says it. What pretty, rosy faces you had then!"—she sighed bitterly as she raised

her eyes involuntarily to the pale face of her daughter, who was stitching away by the light of a tallow candle with ceaseless rapidity. "Can you remember it, Jenny? do you remember the pretty cottage and the little garden, and the roses that grew over the porch?"

"Oh yes, mother, so well; and the Sweet Williams and Old Man in the garden, that we used to pick little nosegays of, to take with us to church and school on a Sunday."

"Ah, the church!" almost groaned the mother: "there it was I and your father were married, and you were all christened; and the bells—I think I can hear 'em now. Ah, child, I was a different creature then! Oh, this is a godless place, and I am grown a'most a heathen. Dear, dear, what's the use o' thinking on it?" and the old woman rocked herself backwards and forwards with increased vehemence, and a low murmuring sound, half-crying and half-moaning. But the thoughts had travelled back to the early days, and would not be recalled, and after a few moments' pause she began again: "And do you remember the parson and his wife, and the young ladies at the Hall, as used to give all you childer of the school a treat at Christmas-time?"

"And the carols we used to sing, and the new clothes they used to give us! Oh, yes, mother, I remember it all; I dream of it many times at night, and it seems so comfortable."

"I wish we'd some one to call and see us now, as would say a word to put good thoughts into one's mind sometimes, for I frets, and grumbles, and groans till I believe I am very wicked. But I can't help it;

I'm a'most worn out in mind and body, and it's my belief I shan't hold out long."

"Oh, mother, don't say that," broke in the poor girl, in a nervous tone: "you'll get better again when spring comes, and you arn't so cold; and perhaps I shall earn a little more, and then you won't have such a starving life."

"No, child, it's my belief, as I said before, as I shan't live to see another spring. I shouldn't mind it if it wern't for you, and if I could only lie in our own churchyard at home,—it always looked so bright and fresh; but oh! these churchyards here, I can't abide to think on them: I always wonder, when I looks on them, where will they find room for the next poor cretur as will come and ask for a bed of earth among them." "Jenny," resumed the old woman, after a pause, "do you think now the parson would come again to see us, if you were to go and ask him? Ever since Jem and his bad companions was so imperdent to him, he's never shewed his face inside the door: to be sure, he's a sight to do, and we've no right to trouble him; but somehow, when I'm lying awake at nights I gets scared like, and some words as you children used to say out of the Bible when you com'd home from school, about a great trumpet sounding, and the judgment-day, and all standing before the throne of God, keeps ringing in my head, till I don't know what to make of it. Oh dear! I wish I'd gone on going to church. But then the church was so far off, and so full, and there never seemed any place for the likes of me; and the fine sexton always looked so astoned like when I came in, as if he wondered

what brought me there ; and then my clothes got so shabby ;"—and the poor old woman rambled on, as if she would fain satisfy her own conscience. Her daughter put in a gentle word now and then, but she did not seem to heed her much, and went on, sometimes moaning over past days, sometimes bitterly bewailing the weariness and hardships of the present.

The warmth from the dying embers grew less and less, the candle burnt more dimly, and the wind blew more keenly, and seemed to enter at every crevice of the walls ; but still the old woman sat by the fire, and the patient daughter worked on as if for her very life, with a nervous glance at the candle from time to time, to see how much more of her daily task it would let her complete.

A clock from the neighbouring factory slowly told out the hour ; the mother counted it aloud. "Lor, child, there's eleven o'clock, and Jem not come home yet ! what can he be about ? Lack-a-day, the trouble that lad costs me ! it's he as makes my heart so cold. What will be the end of him ? Each night I look to hear as the police have got him ; and maybe better for him, too,—he'd be out of harm's way for a time : but oh ! his poor father, it's well he's gone. Listen, Jenny ; is that him a-coming ?" she exclaimed anxiously, as the sound of riotous mirth was heard in the distance.

Jenny dropped her work and listened too with painful intenseness. "No, mother," she said, after a few moments' pause, "it's not him ; they've turned the corner. Do go to bed, dear mother ; I can sit up for Jem. You know it's all gain for me sitting up," she added, and tried to smile, "because I can do more work ; and I

expect to be paid for this when I take it home, and what a thing that'll be, mother ! I shall buy you some tea at once ; I saw some in the window of the new shop a farthing an ounce cheaper than what we've been paying ; and you'll feel better when you get some tea again." The poor girl tried to exert herself to talk on in a cheerful tone, but it was in vain,—the mother could not be cheered, and was listening eagerly to every sound.

It was evident the light would not last much longer, and as it was the last bit of candle they had in the house, Jenny, with a sigh, thought it better to put away her work, and put out what remained of the candle, that there might be a bit to light when Jem came in. She folded up her work very carefully, and was just going to wrap it up in a cloth, when it attracted her mother's notice. " Well, that is a fine gown ; and who's a-going to wear such a thing as that ? None o' the poor servant-girls as you works for, I doubt."

" No, mother ; this is for one of the grand servants at the big house. I began to tell you how I got it the night afore last, but you were a fretting so about Jem that you didn't heed, and I stopped talking."

" Ah, child, strange it is that he who has brought his mother more sorrow than ever she know'd in her life, should be the one as should be always in her mind. Sometimes I says to myself, What's the use o' thinking on him ? he brings you nothing but misery, and doesn't care a fardin what becomes of you ; give him up : but ah, it's no use trying ; perhaps I works myself up to feel hard against him for a bit, but a very

little bit it is, and then I'm a-thinking on him as fond as ever again. No,—he'll break my heart, it's like enough, but he can't break it's love." And then again the poor old woman swayed her body to and fro, and gave some half-audible groans. Jenny had put out the candle and was seated by her mother, almost ready to fall asleep where she sat, from exhaustion. Only a few sparks glimmered on the hearth, and ever and anon the moon pierced through the heavy masses of cloud that floated in the air, and shone in at the curtainless window. The light rested on the old woman's face, and gave it such a deathly look that Jenny started and felt for her hand: it was very cold, and she rubbed it between hers. The silence seemed awful to her, and she began to speak: "Mother, shan't I tell you how I got the fine gown to make? wouldn't you like to hear?"

"Yes, tell me, dear," the mother answered, in the tone of one who was trying to rouse her attention.

Jenny told her little story of her visit to "the big house,"—which meant the manor-house,—and of her interview with the smartly-dressed servant, who, she said, talked "a sight" about the last fashions, and gave most particular directions how the gown was to be made, and told her she was to take it home to-morrow night without fail.

"And shall you get it done, Jenny?—It won't do to disappoint them grand folks; any ways, them as thinks themselves so grand,"—the mother asked.

"I think I shall, mother. If it wern't for the want of light, I'd get it done quick enough; but one don't know how to manage it now. In summer-time there's

the morning light, but now it's no use getting up betimes, for it burns such a sight of candle. I've often thought, mother, how handy it would be if one lived close to a lamp-post, and could work by the lamp-light."

"You work too hard and long as it is, child," said the mother, in an anxious tone, as the moon's ray fell this time on the daughter's pale face: "you'd better go to bed, dear, it's no use our both a-sitting up; and I couldn't rest if I went, so you go, and try to sleep and get one o' your pleasant dreams about the old times."

"Oh no, mother, I'm not tired: Jem can't be long; I'd rather wait with you."

The poor old woman made no further remonstrance, and they sat on side by side, shivering with cold and hunger, but neither spoke of what she felt. The mother's thoughts were of her child—not of the gentle, dutiful one who sat beside her, but of the wild and reckless one who heeded her not, nor all her anxious love. His was a character too frequent, alas! among high and low, rich and poor. A careless, light-hearted lad, his mother's darling, unrestrained and indulged, he grew up to man's estate, never seeking anything but his own gratification. For a long time the consequences of this fearful but common course of life did not shew themselves in their full force, for being a good-natured lad, he was not tempted to be harsh or unkind, and his inclinations did not at first lead him into vicious habits. But the evil seed was there, it was never uprooted, so of necessity it grew and strengthened; it needed but time and a genial atmosphere to bring forth its deadly fruits. The latter was soon provided:

a public-house of the lowest description was set up in the narrow, miserable street where the Mortons lived. It was crowded nightly by the worst characters: some of these lodged near, and soon saw in Jem Morton an easy prey; they rested not till they had done their master's work, and led him into sin. Never accustomed to deny himself anything he wished, utterly reckless of the consequences of this self-indulgence, Jem soon became one of this wicked crew, and filled to the brim his mother's cup of misery.

The wind howled on, and driving sleet and snow fell fast, but between the gusts of the storm might be heard the loud shouts of hoarse laughter, and scraps of drinking-songs, from the wretched groups who staggered home to their miserable dwellings from these hotbeds of sin and destruction. The moon looked calmly down, and then again hid her face behind a cloud, as if her pure light could not shine on scenes so dark.

There was a grand ball to-night at the Assembly Rooms, and carriages were rolling about in all directions. As their gaily-dressed owners stepped into them, they shuddered at the coldness of the night, and when they passed some of the groups we have mentioned they shuddered yet more, and spoke in bitter terms of the dreadful state of demoralization of the lower classes of the town.

True, too sadly true! And yet it may be that He who sits in the throne judging right,—not the actions only, but the thoughts and intents that give rise to them,—looked down in pity and displeasure on either class alike.

Self-indulgence made those wretched objects what they are,—self-indulgence in debasing pleasures, because none more refined came within their reach; but *self-indulgence*, be it ever remembered, was the source from whence this foul stream flowed.

And what but *self-indulgence* actuated many (not all, God be thanked, but many) whose carriages now rolled by? Self-indulgence in *refined* pleasures,—in days passed in idleness, in nights spent in folly. How did either class fulfil the purpose of their existence—accomplish the work appointed for them to do? For all had their work, did they but know it.

The factory clock had long tolled out the midnight hour, the poor mother, worn out with anxious watching, had fallen asleep where she sat, her head resting on her daughter's shoulder. Jenny had now no inclination to sleep, but she sat very still, for fear of awaking her mother, and her thoughts pondered over their hard life of suffering, and she racked her brain to discover whether there was no way to help them out of it. Must they always go on in this miserable manner, striving beyond strength to gain wherewith to satisfy nature, and yet always feeling the cravings of hunger, the suffering of cold? She had a good deal of what might be called natural religion; she felt that they must endure, and must not murmur against God's will, and she had faint, undefined feelings that peace and joy would come hereafter.

She was about ten years old when they came to Gainsworth, and since then had had little or no instruction; her mother could not read, so what Jenny did know had been acquired through her own exertions,

and by treasuring up what she had learnt at the village school. When first they came, she had gone with the others to work at the mill; but the poor mother saw with bitter grief the corrupting influence of bad companions on two of her elder daughters, and never rested till she had taken Jenny away, and hoarded a little sum of money, enough to apprentice her to a third-rate dressmaker. Times were not so hard then, for her husband was living.

Jenny and Jem were twins, the two youngest of the ten children. They had grown up together,—shared, as little ones, their toys and their tasks, their childish joys and sorrows. Outward circumstances, advantages and disadvantages, were alike to both. And yet what different results had they produced! “As of the green leaves on a thick tree, some fall, and some grow, so is the generation of flesh and blood.” And yet all may grow and bring forth fruit to life eternal, if they but will it.

Jenny sat pondering on, and her mother’s words about the clergyman came to her mind. Should she go and ask him to come? Oh no, she would never have the courage; she did not know where he lived: and besides, very likely he would think it impertinent, and perhaps the servants would not listen to her, and send her away.

The clergyman of this fearfully overgrown district was a man of about five-and-thirty, of an amiable, gentle disposition, but with the failing often accompanying that temperament, want of energy. He was right-minded, and anxious about his flock, but he was appalled by the overwhelming masses sunk in vice

and ignorance, among whom he had to labour, and instead of trying to do something at once, to snatch one brand from the burning, he expended his small stock of energy in useless lamentations on the dreadful wickedness around, and vague reflections on what he would do, were he otherwise situated.

But poor Jenny knew nothing of his character, and could not guess how groundless were her fears—for he would certainly have come, had she gone for him. She, too, felt sometimes her mother's midnight terrors; the memory of early teaching would then wake up, and she would think the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah must fall on a place that seemed to her given up to wickedness as great as that of those monumental cities.

But now another loud shout is heard in the distance, and Jenny's heart beats quick; she tried to move her mother's head gently, to rest on the chair instead of her shoulder, (the poor old woman was so worn out that the movement did not arouse her,) and then stood up and listened at the window. This time the miserable party did not turn the corner, but stopped at the door of the house where the Mortons lodged, and Jenny knew by the sounds the sickening sight that awaited her;—a sight become, alas! familiar now, but which she could never see without an inward loathing and tremor. Two of his wretched companions, who were best able, carried Jem Morton upstairs, laid him on the floor, and, with jokes which made Jenny's heart sick, left him.

The bit of candle was lighted again, the poor mother awoke with a groan, and murmured "God ha'

mercy on him;" she helped her daughter to move the wretched man to his bed, which was in a closet opening into the room they inhabited; and then they prepared to lie down themselves for the rest of the night. Jenny knelt by the bed-side, and said her evening prayer; it was a simple, childish prayer, the one that had been taught her long ago at the village-school, but it was a confession of faith and dependence on the Almighty. It was perhaps a grain of salt that kept the whole mass from utter putrefaction, the cry that pierced the ears of the Lord, and averted for awhile His judgments from descending.

The grey light of a cold winter's morning found its way at last to the narrow, dark street, and Jenny crept as gently as she could out of bed, thankful that her mother still slept. She would not light a fire for herself, but rubbing her hands, and breathing on them to warm them, she took out her work, and sat down again patiently to her daily toil.

Her mother still slept, and Jenny cast hurried, anxious glances from time to time at her worn, wasted face; she thought it looked thinner than ever. What if her mother's words should come true, and she should be left alone friendless and unprotected in this vast, and, as it seemed to her, godless city. Where should she turn to? Oh that there were but some place of refuge, some one who would take her in, where she might be safe from harm, and she would not care how hard she worked. She had never been to service; her mother could not bear to part with her, and she had no means of getting her into a good place, had she been willing to let her go; and the miserable life of

the overtasked maids-of-all-work whom she saw in the little shops in the neighbourhood, was certainly no inducement to send away the only one of all her children who yet remained to comfort her.

The morning wore on, and neither of the sleepers awoke. It was very unusual for her mother to sleep so long, and it made Jenny uneasy, for she feared it betokened great exhaustion; and the deep-drawn breath, too, seemed to speak of weakness. Her poor, unhappy brother was not likely to awake yet awhile, and she could not think of seeing him up without a shudder. Continual self-indulgence had made him harsh and unfeeling in his manner, and during the little time he was with them he grumbled at everything, accused his sister of looking cross and ill-tempered, and hastily resented the slightest remonstrance which his mother attempted on the evil of his ways. They could hardly believe he was the dear, good-natured Jem of former days. But could they have analysed his character, they would have seen that the present was but the natural fruit of the past. The good-nature was only shewn when it was easy to himself, the kindness when it involved no self-denial.

Jenny's hands grew so cold and numbed, her work would not get on, so after a few moments' deliberation, she decided that it would be the best economy to light a little fire. Little it must be, for little there was to make it with; but the blaze of the few sticks was very cheering, and she drew the low stool close to it, and stitched away, consoling herself with the thought of getting paid for her work at once,—and then her

mother should have some tea, and a better fire. Poor girl, she could not help continuing her nervous glances at the pale face of the sleeper, to assure herself that she still slumbered, and had not sunk into that sleep which knows no awakening. She almost longed to rouse her, to hear her voice once more, but she restrained herself.

Jem awoke ; his sister went to his door, and pointed to her mother's bed, as a signal to him to be quiet. His heart was touched for the moment, as he looked on her, and a voice within whispered, ' Is not this your doing ? ' but it was an unpleasant thought, so it was instantly dismissed, and he only felt more irritable from having had this touch of an awakening conscience, and stifled it. He asked his sister in a harsh whisper, whether she did not mean to give him any breakfast. She had eaten none herself, and part of a loaf was all there was in the house. She brought it out and set it before him. As usual, he grumbled at the discomfort of his home, not choosing to remember who it was that caused it, and ate the food earned by the weary toiling of that weak woman's hands, for whom he should have provided, while his wages were used but for the indulgence of his own sinful passions. He left the house, when he had finished his breakfast, without saying where he was going, or when he should return. Jenny cut off a piece of bread to eat when she should feel too weak to go on without it, and putting the remainder of the loaf away, again sat down to make the most of the few hours of daylight.

There were no harsh thoughts in her mind ; she did not in her heart reproach her brother for his selfish-

ness and unkindness : endurance seemed a habit now. She only thought life was very sad and dreary, and, but for the fear of hindering her work, would have laid her head on the table, and eased her weary heart by a good cry ; but she had not time for it, so the choking sobs were gulped down, the aching eyes were fixed on the work, and the tired fingers moved on again.

In course of time her mother awoke, and looked round with a dreamy, bewildered expression, and passed her hand over her eyes. Jenny put down her work, and moved at once to the bed-side and spoke to her, for her strange look half frightened her. " Was it a dream, then," the old woman said at length, " and are we still in this weary place ? Oh, my child, I had such a beautiful dream ; I thought that I was a-dying, and fretting about leaving you, and murmuring over what would become of you, left by yourself here, and thinking what an awful thing it was to come into the world at all, when all at once—how she came in I never minded—a sweet-looking lady sat by my bed ; I suppose it was owing to our talking about the young ladies down at the old place : but there she sat beside me ; she looked very grave, but very happy, and she told me there was no need for me to be fretting, for she should take care of you when I was gone. And she said times were going to change at Gainsworth, and the poor should no longer cry unheard, the Lord had raised up a deliverer for them ; and then it seemed as if she almost changed, and I could not tell whether she still belonged to this earth, for she seemed to rise in the air, and she called you and me after her, and we were all carried away, till I thought we sat under

the shade of some beautiful trees, and the grass was so green and fresh, and the wood-pigeons were singing in the woods, and the sound of a church-bell came to my ears, and it seemed as if the bells rang to the words, "The Lord will provide." And now, my child, whether that dream means anything or not—and some holds that there's a sight of meaning in dreams—it's given me a feeling of peace at the heart that I arn't felt this many a long day, and I'll not be after fretting in this manner any more. Life is very hard, there's no gain-saying that, but it won't last for ever; and I'll keep those words by me, and use 'em whenever troubles seem biggest. I think I mind the minister at home reading them out of the Bible,—don't you, Jenny?"

"Yes, mother, I know they are in the Bible."
"Well, then, all that's in the Bible is sartain sure, and we'll try to hold by that; and I'll trust you to God, my poor girl, when I go." She paused, and a shudder came over her face as she said, "But poor Jem, we must ask God to have pity on him. Perhaps, if my dream's true, and the Lord provides, He'll provide ministers, too, as shall look after the poor godless sinners in this place, and turn them from their evil ways. Don't you think so, Jenny?"

"I hope so, mother. Ah! if we had some like the beautiful lady in your dream, who'd come and sit down and speak a word of comfort, it would be very cheering. But all seem to live on in this place, each one for himself. Money, money, money, that's all the cry; how to make it, how to scrape the greatest lot of it together. Mother, I've heard as the gentleman who the big house belongs to, and a sight of

houses and streets in this place, lives in such a beautiful place, long, long away in the quiet country, and that he has only one daughter, the loveliest young lady you ever see'd, and all this will be hers some day. I wonder if it ever comes across her, what a sight of misery and sorrow there is in this place where they must get their money from."

"Why, who told you all that Jenny?"

"Harriet Jenkins, that works at the mill close by; and she said that the gentleman and his daughter came here last year, I think, or the year afore, and she heard as he'd given a sight of money to the minister to give to the poor. Howsoever, we've never been the better for it; but I 'spose the minister gives it to those who he knows, and who go to his church. Oh, mother, I'm glad you've had that dream, for somehow, when I think about it all, the rich and the poor,—the gaiety and joy that seems their portion, and the trouble, and hunger, and sorrow that seems to crush the life out of the poor, I'm all bewildered like, and feel as if I couldn't make head or tail of it. But ah, there's a God in heaven, and He knows all."

CHAPTER VI.

"Of the past the old man's thoughts were,
And the maiden's of the future."

LONGFELLOW.

CONSTANCE sat alone in the large, handsomely furnished drawing-room of a house in London, looking into the Park. She leant back in an easy-chair, and though a book was in her hand, she could have given no account of the page upon which her eyes had been fixed for the last ten minutes.

The weather was unusually warm for the beginning of April, and there seemed something almost oppressive in the atmosphere; and longing for air, she threw down her book, opened the glass door of a conservatory, and walked into it. A marble pedestal stood in the centre, on which was a vase with gold and silver fish, with rose-coloured camellias and white azaleas ranged round it. Constance leant upon it, lifting the blossoms of the plants and looking at them, and then at the poor little prisoners in the glass bowl. She heard nothing of a step that entered the drawing-room, nor of a voice that said half-audibly, "That is as pretty a picture as I have seen for a long time. Were it any one else, I should almost fancy the attitude and distraction were assumed; but there's not a grain of affectation in her composition."

The step moved on to the conservatory-door, and then in a grave voice was said, "Mademoiselle, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer."

Constance started so much, that General Lessington almost repented of his joke ; but she recovered herself instantly, and said, "I beg your pardon ; I did not know you were in the drawing-room. I am afraid I have been keeping you waiting."

"Nay, it's I should beg your pardon," was the answer, as he held her by both hands, and looked admiringly in her face. It was an effort to him to refrain from saying, "How pretty you do look ;" but he did refrain, for one who knew Constance much less intimately than he did, would have felt that such a speech would be disagreeable to her. She moved into the drawing-room, and he drew a chair beside her, and sat down. "It is an unexpected pleasure, finding you here. Have you been in Town long ? It's a month earlier than you usually come, is it not ?" he asked.

"Yes, it is earlier than usual ; but Papa had to come up, so I thought he had better let me come with him, and take care of him. We have been here just a fortnight. How did you leave Eustace ?"

General Lessington gave a rather searching glance at her as she asked the question, and answered, "Better, I really hope. I was very unwilling to leave him ; but you know, of course, that he has a college friend with him, a nice young fellow, a younger son of Sir Philip Rosneath's : they seemed good company for each other ; and willing or loth, I was forced to come up to Town for a few days."

"And you have been at Rockwood since, have you not ?"

"Yes, Lady Rockwood kindly urged it, and I went

to them for a week. You do not know what a character I heard of you."

"That I am a bad correspondent?"

"Oh, far worse. Your aunt laments over you in a truly pathetic style. You are throwing away your own happiness,—do not know what is for your own good,—are so dreadfully fastidious,—and last, and perhaps least, are breaking hearts innumerable."

The colour mounted into Constance's cheek, while she said, with a slight tone of indignation, "Oh, General, that's not kind; only I know you are only joking."

"Well, seriously, your aunt recounted in a mournful tone the variety of offers you have refused, and all such excellent *partis*."

"But that is not true. Who could have told her so?"

"Not true in the letter, perhaps, for I know some little lady who is too dignified to allow that final catastrophe to occur; and yet, in the spirit and imagination of the unhappy admirer, I doubt not it has occurred again and again."

"I cannot help it, indeed, General, if it has. I do not think it is my fault. Oh, surely you know me too well to think that I would willingly encourage such things!"

There was an earnestness in her voice, and an almost pained expression in her face, that made the kind-hearted old General quite indignant with himself for having caused it; and he answered eagerly, "Know you, my dear Constance! I do know you to be a sweet, winning creature, whom it is no wonder

that to see is to love; and I know, too, that you would never for one moment trifle with anyone's happiness, or willingly receive that affection from another which you could not return."

"Thank you, General, for believing it, and for speaking seriously. I daresay it is foolish, but I cannot bear joking on that subject. It always seems to me such a wicked thing, for the love of admiration to make others unhappy." Her eyes were cast down while she spoke, and she stopped abruptly, and then after a moment's pause asked, "How did you leave them all at Rockwood?"

"Very well. You have heard *the* news from there, I suppose; have you not?"

"No; what news?"

"Oh, I forgot, I only left yesterday, and it was but just settled: perhaps I ought not to forestall your aunt's letter that will doubtless duly arrive by to-morrow's post, but I think I must. Your cousin Dora is going to be married?"

"Is she? To whom?"

"Who do you think? Can you guess?"

"No, I have not the least idea."

"To Captain Everington."

"Is she really? Oh, I am so glad! Poor Captain Everington, he was so kind; I am sure he will make her an excellent husband."

General Lessington smiled to himself at the unconscious little epithet of compassion which had revealed—what he had never doubted—his previous attachment to herself.

"I thought the wind was setting that way when I

met him last year: he began to discover such a decided likeness to you," he added, with a smile. "He wished me to see it too. Now, though I think Miss Dora Ellermaine a very nice young lady, and wonderfully improved since you spent that summer together, I could not, even to oblige him, discover the likeness. Still he thought he saw it, poor fellow, and has consoled himself as best he could, and the wedding is actually to come off, as Percy would say, this spring. His father, though he is the second son, will make him a handsome allowance, and his mother's fortune, about £40,000, which was settled on the younger children, of course comes to him; so there will be no trouble about the settlements, or anything so unromantic, that might serve to make good the old adage, 'The course of true love never did run smooth.'"

"I am so glad to hear it," Constance said again. "They are to come up in a fortnight.—Dear Dora, I hope she will be happy."

"I think she will," he answered: "they seem well-suited for each other. I suppose you have hardly seen anyone since you came to town?"

"We seem to have visitors and invitations every day: I thought we should have been very quiet."

"Who do you think I met just now, walking in the most absent, *distracted* fashion, as if he meant to be run over?—Gerard Clifford. I thought he was abroad, and had nearly passed him without speaking; and I am not very sure I had made him conscious of the fact that we had met, when we parted, he looked so *préoccupé*. You have not seen him, I suppose?"

"No; I did not know he was in England."

"I asked him how long he had been in England, and he said, 'Oh, some weeks;' but I am not very sure that he did not mean days. You will see him before long, I daresay."

"Perhaps so; but very likely he does not know we are in London."

"Yes; I mentioned that I was on my way here,—which seemed to rouse him momentarily from his reverie. He is a strange fellow, but a clever and a pleasant one."

Constance made no answer to this observation, and there was a pause of some moments, when General Lessington asked, "Have you heard anything of the Sedgeleighs? I have so often thought of them. Eustace has heard nothing for months, he says."

"I have heard from Ada, but her letters give little or no information. It is so painful, writing in that constrained way. I do so wish I could see her: one meeting must break down all this barrier of restraint and reserve. I can quite understand her brother's feeling in shunning his old companions, but it is very sad to be obliged to give her up."

"Poor fellow! he has no need to avoid anyone, for I am sure a more honourable man never breathed," said General Lessington. "What miseries has that despicable, selfish vice of gambling brought on the world! what ruin of families, what dreadful crimes might trace their origin to a man weakly or idly yielding to the temptation of amusing himself by a little betting or speculation!—But I am getting into a strange style of conversation for a young lady."

Constance was not sure that she felt much like one

just now, but she turned the subject to Eustace and Torquay, of which she longed to hear more. She could gather from General Lessington's answers that he had often been very uneasy about Eustace, and even now, though there had certainly been a slight, gradual amendment, he seemed unwilling to speak too hopefully. His constant thoughtfulness and gravity seemed unnatural in a young man, and made the General perhaps think worse of him than he would otherwise have done. He had puzzled himself as to the cause of this depression, and somehow or other, fancied it connected with Constance, though how, he had never directly decided. She was evidently altogether unconscious of being herself in any degree the cause of the secret grief that oppressed him.

General Lessington sat on, talking to her, and watching her speaking face, and half fancying that it, too, looked graver than of old: he could not resist the question, though it came with the apology, "You will forgive an old man's impertinence—but are you the same merry, light-hearted bird that used to warble out its songs in the joy of its heart?"

There was a kind interest in the tone, and a kinder look in the eyes that were fixed upon her as the question was asked, that made Constance give a more earnest answer than her inclination would have prompted to that question; but she paused ere she spoke, and then hesitatingly said, "I do not know that I do feel so merry; but I suppose it is only because I am growing older. Perhaps I expected I should find more to satisfy than there is in the life I generally lead; and there may be a little feeling of

weariness sometimes,—but oh, it is nothing,—and I can make myself very merry still,” she said, with a little laugh which had not quite the gaiety of the little laughs of former days that Percy used to delight in; but it cheered her warm-hearted old friend, as he still looked anxiously at her, and then, with one or two more kind words, rose, wished her good-bye, and left the house.

Day after day passed away. Constance and her father rode out and drove out, were at frequent dinner-parties, and met in succession all their friends, as they came up for the season,—all but one, Gerard Clifford. Occasionally Constance wondered why he did not call. She recalled the rides and talks at Elvanlees, and felt that none she now had, gave her the same pleasure; but yet, as days passed on and still he came not, and appeared entirely indifferent as to renewing his acquaintance, she checked the thoughts that turned towards him, and tried to lay the stern law upon herself, that till he sought her again, she would not allow her mind to dwell upon him; and yet she could but feel there was no one like him among all whom she met.

Lord and Lady Rockwood and their daughters came to London. The day after their arrival Constance went to see them. She was shewn into the drawing-room, which was empty, and whilst she was hesitating whether she should run up at once to Dora's room, or wait till she came down, the door opened, and Captain Everington was announced. For a moment there was a little embarrassment in his manner, and his kind, handsome face looked slightly troubled and discon-

certed. But Constance's satisfaction at the engagement was so genuine, and her pleasure at meeting him again under such happy circumstances so sincere, that all unpleasant feelings melted away under the genial warmth of her kind, gentle greeting. And when Dora came in, a few minutes after, there was no need for any explanation; but Captain Everington looked on with entire contentment at the affectionate welcomings of the cousins, and if he drew any comparison between the two, Dora did not suffer from it.

The wedding was to take place soon, and Constance was constantly in requisition: her taste was consulted incessantly in the various minutiae of the *trousseau*; for though her own toilette did not afford her the usual delight, she was one of those whom all seem unanimously to agree in consulting; and she paid more visits to milliners, dressmakers, and jewellers in a week, than she would have done on her own account during the whole season.

Percy was now at home on leave, and gladly accepted his uncle's invitation to join him in London for a short time. He was generally popular, and was a decided favourite with the Rockwood party, so that his coming did not interfere with the frequent meetings between the cousins. He and Captain Everington had been friends of old, and soon renewed their friendship.

One day all the party chanced to meet at luncheon at Mr. Montrevor's. The ladies had been shopping during the morning, and Captain Everington and Percy whiled away an hour or two at the Royal Academy, and returned full of one of the pictures.

"It is the most extraordinary likeness, if it is not intended for one, that I ever saw," Percy was saying to his uncle, as they came into the room together: "is it not, Everington?"

"Yes, a very striking one, and a striking picture altogether."

"Which is it?" asked Lady Rockwood, "and who is it a likeness of? I do not think I was much struck with the portraits; but then I have only paid one hasty visit to the Exhibition."

"But this is not a portrait," Captain Everington answered; "it is only a fancy picture, called 'Spring Flowers.'"

"Who is it like, then?"

"Why, Percy Montrevor and I think it remarkably like Miss Montrevor."

"Like Lily!" Dora exclaimed: "Oh, do give us a description of the picture."

"Percy, you describe," Captain Everington said, appealingly; "I am no hand at descriptions, and I am sure I am the worst person to ask: besides, there is so little to describe; it is the expression, and the attitude, and an indescribable something, that make it such a striking picture."

"Expression!" Lord Rockwood remarked, who had been studying the "Times," and not attending to what passed, "I thought you called it 'Spring Flowers.'"

"Yes, that is the name; but it is a picture of a young girl, sitting on a bank with some flowers in her hand,—lilies and wild rose-buds, I think they are; they are exquisitely painted, but still one thinks nothing of them,—it is the beautiful expression in her face that

rivets one, half childish and half womanly: she is gazing on the distant landscape, as if she were sitting there dreaming of some bright, hidden future, and wondering what it would bring to her."

"Who is the artist?" Mr. Montrevor asked.

"A name I never heard,—Kenelm. I think this is his first year of exhibiting."

"Kenelm! Oh, I know now why the name was so familiar to me," Captain Everington interposed: "I felt sure I knew it, but could not think why; but now I remember, there was a young artist of that name often in Clifford's rooms, and he took a great interest in him: I wonder if he has seen this picture."

"Is Mr. Clifford in London, then?" Percy asked.

"Yes, I hear so; but strange to say, I have never met him: I have called often at his house, but he is always out; I cannot think where, for one never meets him anywhere."

"Lily, did you ever see this artist," Percy enquired, eagerly: "I think you must, and that he sketched that face from memory. It is such a strange likeness."

"I have not the least recollection of ever having seen him," she answered; "I should not think it likely that I have."

"I should like to find the fellow out, and ask him where he got the idea for his picture from," he continued, with an eagerness that amused Lady Rockwood.

"We will certainly go in a body this afternoon and see the picture, and pass judgment upon it," she said: "I have quite a curiosity to see it; have not you, Lily?"

“Yes, I shall like to see it very much.”

Luncheon over, the plan was put into effect, and they drove to Trafalgar-square. As Percy conducted them to the picture, Constance noticed among the group who surrounded it—for it was evidently an attractive picture—a head that was not strange to her, and the sight of which made her heart beat a little quicker; but she made no remark, and Gerard Clifford, for he it was, moved away without, apparently, having seen them, and left the room.

The picture was quite as pretty as Percy had pronounced it, and the likeness to Constance certainly enough to strike anyone. She smiled when her aunt asked her what she thought of herself, and said, “If you say it is like, I suppose it is: I cannot see the slightest likeness, but I like the picture very much.”

Lord Rockwood was much taken with it, and so was Mr. Montrevor, and both felt an inclination to purchase it, but it was already sold. They staid but a few minutes, and then went away together, leaving the ladies in the charge of Captain Everington and Percy. Lady Rockwood wished to call on her sister, Lady Fitzmaure, and taking Frances with her, drove off, leaving the rest of the party to put into effect a project they had set their hearts upon—that of riding out to Hampstead, that they might inhale air untainted by smoke, Percy said. They returned home as quickly as they could, for the ladies to put on their habits, and set off.

CHAPTER VII.

"Oh! hard the task to man's proud heart,
To see with patient eye
The glittering dreams of youth depart,
Stars from a summer sky."

LORD JOHN MANNERS.

THERE were two very happy couples riding over Hampstead-heath that day. And though, of course, it may not be allowed that Constance's and Percy's enjoyment was equal to that of Captain Everington and Dora, yet in talking of bygone days, recalling rides at home, and hearing of what had happened to each since they had last met, they found the time pass most pleasantly.

They were talking very merrily, or rather Constance was listening to a droll account of a ball Percy was giving, when the attention of both was suddenly arrested; their eyes turned in the same direction, and were fixed on the figure of a young man who was sitting down on the turf at some little distance from them.

"It is he, I am sure," Percy exclaimed,—“poor Harry Sedgeleigh. He does not see us: Lily, shall I go up to him?”

“Oh, yes; but wait,—I will join Dora; he might not like to see me.”

“He's making off. I am afraid he recognised us, and did not wish to be known; but I must go after

him. Poor fellow! how glad Eustace will be to hear of him."

Percy's horse was in a few moments beside the pedestrian, and though he never turned his head, and evidently had no intention of speaking, few could have resisted the warmth and cordiality of Percy's tone, as he sprang from his horse, and seizing Harry Sedgeleigh's hand, said, "My dear old fellow, how glad I am to see you again! How often Eustace and I have longed to meet you!"

He was almost startled by the worn, haggard-looking face that turned to him, and by the sadness with which his friend said, "I have long ceased to hope to meet my former friends: it is kind of them to remember me still; but the streams of our life run now so far apart, that it were perhaps better that nothing should ever recall that they once flowed side by side. Thank you for your kind greeting; I hardly thought I should have been recognised. Do not let me detain you: good-bye." He was turning to walk on, but Percy could not have parted from him thus. His kind heart ached as he looked on the sad, woe-begone aspect of his early friend; and though there had been something haughty in his tone, Percy saw by his quivering lip that trouble was heavy upon him.

"Surely you would not part with an old friend in this way! When we have not met for so long, not to give one five minutes of your time is rather unkind," he said, with one of the smiles that made his words so pleasant.

Harry Sedgeleigh hesitated, but seemed still inclined

to move on, when Percy thought he had a sure means of detaining him, and said, "Have you heard how ill Eustace has been?"

The recollection of Eustace seemed to open the doors of the heart that had been kept forcibly closed, and he eagerly enquired after him; and when once they began to talk, it was not difficult to go on, and side by side the two friends walked, Percy leading his horse; and for some moments, perhaps, the one whose sun of happiness had so early set, forgot the dark clouds that hung over him, and seemed to pass from under their depressing influence into the bright dawn of his youth. They spoke of bygone days—such, at least, as could be touched upon without awakening painful feelings. Percy mentioned that Constance was with him, and pointed her out in the distance, but Harry shrank from seeing her; and when Percy, remembering that he was keeping his companions waiting, told where he was staying, and hoped they should soon meet again, Harry said decidedly that was impossible, his former sadness and reserve seemed to return, and he added, "It were better for me to forget that we have ever met."

But Percy would not listen to him, and was so earnest in his entreaties that, at any rate, he would meet him somewhere, if he would neither come and visit him, nor let him call at his lodgings, that Harry promised to meet him at the British Museum at 12 o'clock on the following day. They appointed the spot for meeting, and took leave of each other. Percy stood for some moments looking after the retreating figure before he mounted his horse and returned to

Constance. She was full of anxiety to hear the result of the interview, and could hardly keep her tears from falling when Percy described the melancholy look of their poor friend. She was disappointed that he had heard nothing of Ada, but hoped much from to-morrow's interview.

Their ride home was much graver than the ride out, and as they passed some merry laughing groups, Percy remarked, "It's a strange thing, is it not, Lily? to think what different lives people lead in this great city. That poor fellow's look will haunt me till I have seen him again. It is one of the things that has always puzzled me, how unequally joy and sorrow, good and evil, seem meted out; but I suppose you and Eustace have settled it all long ago, with your wise heads," he added, with some of his natural merriment of manner.

"It puzzles me every day that I live, Percy," Constance answered; "and more in London, I think, than anywhere."

They rode on in silence, and as they rode, words seemed sounding in Constance's ear, and carried her thoughts far away from the passing scene: they were, "Woe unto you that are rich;" "Blessed be ye poor;" "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things;" "The world passeth away." She looked so grave and thoughtful, that Percy knew she would rather be left to meditate in peace, and practised the unusual piece of self-denial of not disturbing her; and little more was said till they reached home.

After dinner, Percy told Mr. Montrevor of their adventure. His acquaintance with Harry Sedgeleigh

was much slighter than that of the younger members of the family, but from hearing Eustace speak of him, and having seen him occasionally when he had been staying at the Rectory, he felt a considerable interest in him, and was grieved to hear Percy's account.

Punctual to his appointment, Percy was at the place of meeting at 12 o'clock next day. Harry Sedgeleigh was not there, and he began to fear that his resolution had failed, and was impatiently moving about, and scanning every one that entered, when the same worn, melancholy figure met his eye which he had seen yesterday, bearing so unmistakeably the mark of a gentleman, though the dress was neither new nor fashionable. There was again the trouble of breaking through the crust of reserve and restraint before they could talk with any interest, and any one less open-hearted and kindly-natured than Percy would have found it a hard matter to have accomplished it. But he was well repaid for the exertion by the change that came over his friend's face as they gradually attained their natural manner towards each other.

They had a much longer conversation than on the preceding day, and though Percy could gain no more tidings for Constance of Ada and Mrs. Sedgeleigh, than that they were well, and living somewhere in North Wales, he felt that he had made way to-day, as at their parting Harry required no persuasion to promise to meet him again. His place of abode was still unknown, and Percy did not like to ask it, as there was clearly an unwillingness to mention it.

Their meetings became very frequent, and by de-

grees Harry talked openly of his present life, and even told Percy where he lodged, and did not shrink when the former proposed that he should call and see him when he was in the neighbourhood. Constance felt much interest in him, and to her Percy used to relate the full history of their interviews. He had never known Harry so well hitherto, and cared much more for him now than he had ever done before. Mr. Montrevor was anxious that Percy should bring him to his house, but to that he could never persuade him to agree.

His lodging was one back-room at the top of a house in one of the unfrequented streets in the neighbourhood of Russell-square. And there he worked day and almost night too, writing, principally for periodicals, and only for second or third-rate ones. Percy felt more respect for him than he had ever felt for one of his own age, as he reflected on his life;—a young man just entering life, brought up with the prospect of inheriting a large estate, accustomed at home and college to every indulgence, debarring himself of everything but the merest necessities of life, that he might pay debts wilfully and recklessly contracted by one who, though his father, had never shewn him much kindness. For in truth Mr. Sedgleigh had always felt a kind of jealousy and irritability at his son's superior abilities, and was annoyed at his evident shrinking from the life he led himself, and which in his own heart he despised, but had not the courage to give up.

One morning, as Constance was sitting alone in the drawing-room, Percy came rushing in, looking so trou-

bled, that her face was turned towards him in a moment to ask for an explanation.

"I have been to see poor Sedgeleigh," was his answer to her look.

"How is he?"

"Looking wretchedly ill, working himself to death in his miserable dark lodging. I cannot tell you, Constance, how the sight of that man troubles me. A fine intellect ground down, and dulled almost, by the galling pressure of poverty."

"Is he writing anything now?"

"Yes, for some third-rate periodical."

"But surely he must be known in time, and get on?"

"In time! Yes, if he can live to wait for it. He told me to-day he thought he was getting paralysed,—that sometimes it was such hard work to him to write or to think, and when he turned in to look for ideas in his mind, that used to give them to him so freely, and with so little effort, it seemed now all vacant and empty; or if they were still there, they were so clogged over with the crushing cares of daily life, that he had not strength to get them out. And yet there seems no means of helping him. I believe he has felt that he has abilities enough to rise and make his own way in the world, and at times I almost think there is a sort of proud determination that his own mind shall make his fortune, or it shall never be made at all."

"He must be very unhappy," Constance said, looking very grave: "I should so like to see him again. Could you not bring him here? I think, Percy, his

mind must have got into a most unhealthy state. Always sitting alone, tasking himself to the utmost, and then, when exhausted, brooding over his melancholy fate. Would he not come here sometimes? it would be a change, at least, and might give a fresh channel to his thoughts; the old one must be worn very deep, with the stream always flowing down it."

"It would be an excellent thing for him, but I fear it would be vain to attempt to bring him. Poor fellow! he feels the change in his position, and shrinks from contact with his old associates."

"But he need see no one but my father and me; and the change of rooms alone for an hour or two would be relaxation."

"Yes, it would. I will try again; but I have not much hope of succeeding."

"Do. I remember he used to be fond of music when he was staying with you at the Rectory: tell him he shall have some, if he will come."

"If we could get him here once, he would want no inducement to return, I am sure," he answered, as he looked at the gentle, sympathizing face that glowed at the thought of his trials, and the tears on the drooping eyelashes; but he said nothing more, and going in search of his uncle, left Constance, her heart full of a sorrow that seemed greater than any that had ever before come under her observation, and wondering if there were no possibility of helping him.

Her thoughts, however, were not long undisturbed, for in a few minutes after Percy had left the room, Frances and Dora Ellermaine entered it. Dora's wedding was drawing very near, and there were many little

points to be talked over. She sat down by Constance, and after her opinion had been asked on one or two subjects, said, "Oh, Constance, I wanted to tell you, for I think you knew him, that Charles has asked Mr. Clifford to come for the morning." Dora did not quite like saying the word *wedding*; she was beginning to get rather out of spirits at the thought of leaving home.

"And is he coming?" Constance asked, in a voice that betrayed no particular interest.

"Yes," Dora answered. "Charles seems so fond of him: is he a very nice person?"

"He is very clever and agreeable. He was a great friend of Eustace's,—they were abroad together; and I think my acquaintance with him has been more through Eustace than from personal intercourse."

After half an hour's chat they left her, and Constance thought of what they had told her, and was getting into a pleasant little reverie, till, remembering her resolution, she got up quickly from her seat, went to the piano, and began to sing to banish thought; whether she altogether succeeded, we will not say.

Dora's wedding-day came. She had grown so tired of all the preparations and the excitement, that she began to think, though she dreaded the leaving home, that it would be a relief when it was over. But when the morning actually arrived, she could almost have wished for a reprieve. Constance was early at the house, and in the bride's room, and did not leave her till the carriages were at the door, and she had to go with some of her sister bridesmaids to .

the church. We will not describe the wedding, which was like all others. No doubt a full account appeared in the "Morning Post," in which the lovely bride, the beautiful bridesmaids, the illustrious relatives, the noble friends who honoured the ceremony with their presence, were fully described.

There were some eyes which were fixed more on one of the bridesmaids than on the bride, and which watched every expression of that face, that looked subdued and awed as each word of the solemn, beautiful service was listened to with reverent attention.

It was soon over. The vows were made on earth, and doubtless registered in heaven, which bound two beings by indissoluble ties to each other for the term of their mortal life. To love, honour, obey, cherish one the other they had solemnly promised before God's altar, and Constance almost trembled as the words fell on her ear, and the thought crossed her mind, how awful it would be to make such a promise, unless the whole heart went with the words. And yet her short experience of life had taught her that marriages in which worldly position and advantages were the first things considered, were, to say the least, as common as those in which mutual love and esteem were the constraining motives.

The party had returned to the house, the congratulations and pretty speeches to the bride and bridegroom were over, when Constance heard herself addressed by a voice which, though its tone was somewhat altered, she did not forget. Gerard Clifford stood beside her. There was a graver and more troubled expression in his face than when they had

last met, though his tone was, or strove to be, lighter and gayer. He talked on for some time on indifferent subjects, in a slightly satirical tone, and not with his usual ease of manner, and then said, rather abruptly, and with an evident effort, "I had fully anticipated being invited to another event of this interesting kind this season, and I had thought the next 'marriage in high life' that would be announced, would be one of the present fair bridesmaids,"—and he bowed to Constance as he spoke.

"Am I to suppose that is meant for me?" she asked: "I am entirely ignorant of what can have given rise to such a supposition;" and she turned away, and spoke to some one else.

Gerard looked at her with a searching glance, that seemed as if it would have read her inmost heart, but Constance did not turn towards him again; the conversation was uninteresting to her, and the last speech quite annoyed her. She almost wished she had not met Gerard at all, but could have retained her pleasant recollection of him unchanged. He did not move away, at least only a few steps further back, and stood, though she was unconscious of it, watching her attentively, till the announcement that breakfast was ready occasioned a general move.

The bride and bridegroom left soon after breakfast, and Constance went with Frances to her room, and did not see Gerard again till they met in the drawing-room before dinner. He and General Lessington had had a long talk, and to him he had expressed his surprise at finding Miss Montrevor still Miss Montrevor. The General quietly remarked, that perhaps he should

have been surprised too, if he had ever seen anyone he considered good enough for her.

"But," Gerard answered, in a tone of astonishment, "I fancied that she and her cousin Eustace were mutually attached; and though, of course, for one who might marry almost whom she chose, it would be considered a 'very bad match,' I concluded that her father would not have denied her anything, and that we should have heard this charming *mariage d'amour* announced this season."

General Lessington looked more surprised than Gerard as he replied, "What could have put that into your head? Miss Montrevor is no more in love with her cousin than she is with you or me. To think of an old man's eyes being more quick-sighted than a young one's!"

"Are you sure they are, General?"

"Yes, in this case. Why Eustace often alludes to the probability of her marrying, and hopes she will meet with some one worthy of her."

"Is not that a blind, think you?"

"No, I do not. But mark, I did not say that Eustace Montrevor was not in love with his cousin,—it was *vice versa*; but, poor fellow, if he had a boyish fancy, which I sometimes think, I believe he is overcoming it manfully."

"Then there really is not, and never was, anything between them, General?"

"I think I may unhesitatingly say there is nothing. Who can answer for what may have been the romance and fancies of a boy and girl who were almost always together? But my entire persuasion is, that

Eustace has ever been as a brother to Constance, and never will be anything more."

Gerard's expression at this answer would have puzzled a physiognomist: for the first moment a look of extreme pleasure passed over his face, then one of pain and dismay; and leaving General Lessington abruptly, he left the house, and did not return till dinner-time.

He did not approach Constance the whole night, and those who came in contact with him were surprised at the dulness of one who could be so brilliant in society.

There was dancing, but Gerard did not dance. Constance was engaged, as usual, for everything; and though it was an effort to her to be bright and gay, she forced herself to be so. But when all was over, and she was alone in her own room, her ball costume laid aside, and her maid dismissed, she threw herself on the sofa, buried her face in her hands, thought that all was wearying and unprofitable, and wondered why she led the life she did when it was so unsatisfying.

When she came down to breakfast next morning, she found no one in the room but Percy. He had enjoyed himself thoroughly on the preceding day, and after commenting on its events, he added, "I thought *you* looked as if dancing were not quite such a pleasure as it used to be in days gone by, and as if having a train of aspirants longing for the honour of the next dance with you was rather a bore than otherwise. Do you always treat them in that cold and scornful manner?"

"Scornful, Percy! I did not intend to be scornful."

"No, I retract,—that's not the right word; it was not scorn, it was not indifference, but I am not sure that I should prefer it myself."

"I did not know I was either scornful or indifferent, but I think I was very tired;" and after a moment's pause, she added, "Let us have another ride to Hampstead to-day; it would be very refreshing."

CHAPTER VIII.

" Ah! that one presence, morn or eve,
Should fill deserted halls with light;
One breeze-like step, departing, leave
The noonday darker than the night!"

AUBREY DE VREE.

A WEEK had passed away since Dora's marriage: Constance had had a most happy letter from her, from Elvanlees, where she and Captain Everington had gone for the honeymoon. Everything was bright and joyful with them.

Constance enjoyed this letter; it was pleasant to her to dwell on the happiness of others, and that good, kind Captain Everington should have been made so happy was an especial cause of satisfaction. Dora seemed to her so well suited for him and he for her—they would *satisfy* each other. And as she thought upon them, she felt so thankful that she had not yielded to the compassion his distress had caused her, when he had fruitlessly besought her to fill the place Dora now occupied. Much as she liked him, and as her cousin and the husband of another, she felt a great regard for him, yet she knew well that it would have been a fearful mistake to imagine that he could ever have filled her heart. And what woman is justified in marrying, when in her inmost soul she knows that entire love and esteem are not in the heart she professes to give? But now Captain Everington had

met one who would love him entirely, who was not his superior, but would appreciate all his good qualities, and never feel that there were depths in her heart and mind that he had not explored, and never would explore. Yes, they would float smoothly down the stream of life together. And some there are, gentle, amiable, sweet-tempered beings, who seem to float thus calmly down the stream of time, unruffled by excitement, unswayed by passion, unshaken by temptation; the storms and tempests, the rocks and whirlwinds that beset the course of others, seem unknown to them; their voyage is calm and prosperous. So, at least, deem the spectators: and the stormy billows, the raging winds that beset the barks of others, are looked on with fear and dismay. And yet, it may be that these reach soonest the haven where they would be. What recks it of the storms and winds, when that is safely gained!

One day, after a drive, Constance and her father stopped at the Royal Academy, as he had a wish to look again at the picture called "Spring Flowers." She was always glad of an excuse to go there; and was soon intently occupied on the pictures. There was a group round the one Mr. Montrevor sought, and he had to wait a few moments before he could approach it. As one of the gazers turned away, he passed Constance with a sigh, and then a little whistle under his breath, as if to banish thought: she raised her eyes—they met those of Gerard Clifford. He started when he saw her, and was going to bow and pass on, but turned back after a moment and addressed her. He asked some commonplace question as to how she

liked the Exhibition ; in answering, she appealed to him for his opinion on one of the pictures that had particularly taken her fancy, and by degrees they fell into their natural manner towards each other. He was no longer satirical, and she was quite at her ease ; and when Mr. Montrevor returned to the spot where he had left her, after making the tour of the room, he found them so earnestly engaged in conversation that they heeded not his approach ; but he was soon joining in it, and Gerard remained with them till they left. As he walked with them down the stairs, Mr. Montrevor asked him to dine with them the next day. He seemed at the first moment as if he would willingly accept the invitation, and then excused himself hurriedly, muttering something about a previous engagement.

Constance was very glad to have had this little interview,—it seemed to dispel all the disagreeable thoughts that had clouded over her pleasant recollection of him, and she fancied that now that was restored undimmed, she should not care if she did not see him any more at all.

And some days passed without their meeting again. At the dinner-parties and balls which Constance and her father attended every night, he was never seen ; and she used to hear his friends wondering what he could be doing with himself, as even his beloved painting had lost its charms for him, and his studio was generally empty. But one afternoon, as Constance was sitting alone in the drawing-room, having returned earlier than usual from her drive, General Lessington and Mr. Clifford were announced.

"I caught this idle man in the street," General Lessington began, "and insisted upon bringing him in with me. I daresay he will wish to make you believe it was all his natural politeness, but I really have lost patience with him, and am not inclined to excuse him."

"I think I shall have to leave the room overwhelmed with confusion, after such a speech as that; but I shall throw myself on Miss Montrevor's indulgence, if I have been wanting in politeness. I assure you I had no doubt but that she would be thankful to be spared the trouble of receiving morning visitors."

"He is fishing for a compliment, Lily; don't gratify him. He grows more misanthropic and conceited every day."

Constance looked up and smiled, but when she saw Gerard's face she was struck with its expression; it had a look full of trouble, and the badinage was evidently sustained with difficulty.

A woman's heart makes her eye quick of perception, and a look of pain or distress will ever arouse her sympathies. When, after a few moments, General Lessington asked Constance if he might go down and write a note in her father's study, and she and Gerard were alone together, she exerted herself to amuse and interest him, feeling sure that some secret sorrow weighed upon him. Whilst General Lessington was writing his note, Mr. Montrevor came in, and the two sat talking together for nearly an hour—the former entirely forgetting that he had left his companion in the drawing-room. When he remembered it, he started

up, thinking Gerard would be quite provoked at being kept so long; but when he and Mr. Montrevor entered the drawing-room Gerard shewed no signs of impatience, and did not even attempt to move till General Lessington proposed that they should take their departure. As they left the house together, the latter remarked, after eyeing Gerard curiously, "You did not, then, find Miss Montrevor so very uninteresting, nor think it altogether such a bore to call upon her."

Gerard answered, in a voice in which Constance would have detected a shade of suppressed agitation, "I think Miss Montrevor what I ever thought her—a most interesting and fascinating being."

"Bravo, my good fellow, that's well: now we shall have you emerging from your retirement."

"I do not see that that follows. But I must take my leave of you, General; I am going in another direction."

"Farewell, then, until we meet again," the General answered, and they parted company.

Constance was so bright and happy all that evening, which, for a wonder, she and her father passed at home, that he felt quite relieved, for he had begun to have fears that London dissipation was telling upon her health.

Percy's leave had expired, and he had rejoined his regiment, but before doing so he had prevailed on Harry Sedgeleigh to accompany him to his uncle's house. It had been the greatest effort to poor Harry to get over his shrinking from the society of the friends of his prosperity, and nothing but Percy's earnest entreaties could have overcome his objections. He told

Constance that he could not depart in peace unless he left some friend with Harry to dispel the gloom that hung over him.

The interview was a very interesting one to Constance. Percy, believing that no one had such powers of consolation as herself, except perhaps Aunt Mabel, found an excuse to leave the room after he had seen Harry Sedgewick at his ease; and Constance, feeling she had no other motive than kindness, and knowing no other would be imputed to her, strove in every way to please, and to make this visit one happy half-hour in her friend's mournful life.

When once the ice was broken, he could talk more openly and unreservedly to Constance than to Percy, and he spoke much of Ada, saying that she was as the guardian-angel of his life. "Often," he went on earnestly, "I have felt hard, broken-spirited, and ready to murmur against Him who ordains all things; but the thought of her gentleness and patience has come over me, and checked the rising wrath, and I have felt, If a woman can endure this unrepiningly, what am I, that I am cast down?" He told Constance that Ada often talked of her and her aunt, and said that she always looked upon her visits to Elvanlees as the greatest blessings of her life. He did not notice that the colour rushed to Constance's cheeks at those words, nor if he had seen it, would he have known what sent it there.

She felt pained and humbled, as she thought how little she had profited by the blessings Ada spoke of. She had told Ada once, long ago, that she thought her life a safer one than her own; and now the words

crossed her mind, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble," and she felt that even in this life there might be a solution to those thoughts that so often perplexed her, on the apparently unequal distribution of joy and sorrow.

Mr. Montrevor came in before Harry left, and persuaded him to stay luncheon. Percy made Constance sing to them afterwards, and when their friend took his departure, she noticed with joy his brightened aspect, and he readily promised to return again before long. When Percy came back to the drawing-room, after accompanying Harry down-stairs, he performed a *pas seul* before Constance with extreme agility, and then bowing in a solemn manner, said, "I leave this interesting case with much comfort in your experienced hands, and can return now without disquiet to the arduous duties of my military life."

A full account of this interview was written to Eustace, and in answer a request came that Constance would use all her efforts to persuade Harry Sedgeleigh to accept an invitation Eustace had sent him to pay a visit at Torquay, where the doctor insisted on his remaining for at least another fortnight. Constance's persuasions were not ineffectual, though at first she fully expected they would be.

The two friends were once more under the same roof, and enjoying, as of old, free and unrestrained intercourse, though doubtless there were cells in their hearts that they kept sedulously locked, and into which each thought the other never had a peep. But affection, like light, can penetrate through a very narrow crevice; and perhaps Harry Sedgeleigh guessed

why Eustace seemed at times oppressed with a secret grief; and if he did detect the cause, he by no means marvelled at it. They wandered out together, spending hours sitting and lying on the beautiful hills overhanging the sea, talking of many things, present, past, and future.

When, in the course of one of their long conversations, Harry mentioned having heard from Percy that Gerard Clifford was in London, Eustace started, and asked with an eagerness that made Harry rise on his elbow from his couch on the turf to look at him, "And is he much at my uncle's house? I thought he was abroad."

"No, I do not think Percy spoke of his being much there; but then he never cared for him, and perhaps would not have remembered if he were amongst the visitors. They are very gay: I hear your uncle and Miss Montrevor have entered into the full swing of a London life."

"And does she like it?" Eustace asked, while he turned his head away from Harry, and apparently examined attentively the wild-flowers on the turf.

"I never heard; but surely she is not made for that sort of life. When she talked to me, I assure you I was sentimental enough to think of those lines of good old Sir Walter's,—

'When pain and anguish rend the brow,
A ministering angel thou.'

She did talk so sweetly and so gently."

"I find it tremendously hot here," was Eustace's answer; "I think I shall move on; are you inclined?"

But stay where you are ; I will go down a few steps, and get under the shelter of the hill."

"Is this all I have gained in six months' labour?" were his thoughts to himself. "Can I not even hear her spoken of with indifference? Oh, Lily! I could almost wish you were beyond my reach for ever; I think then it would be a less bitter task to forget."

When Harry joined him after some minutes, he exclaimed, "What a capital seat you have got; it looks a spot made for contemplation and reflection: please give me the benefit of yours. What have you been thinking about?"

"I was thinking how many years the tide must have ebbcd and flowed, carrying with it its small contribution of a few grains of sand, before that little bar of sand was formed; but now it is stronger than the ocean, and withstands its mighty waves. Yes," he muttered to himself, as Harry turned to look in the direction he indicated, "Little daily efforts will make the bar at last, I suppose."

Captain Everington and Dora returned to London after a fortnight's stay at Elvanlees. They projected a tour on the Continent, but stayed a few days at Lord Rockwood's before setting forth on their travels. Constance and her father were asked to meet them at dinner the day of their arrival. There was no party, —only Lady Fitzmaure and her daughter, General Lessington, and Gerard Clifford.

The bride looked very happy; and when dinner was over and the ladies had returned to the drawing-room, she sat with Constance on a low couch at the end of

the room, giving her a full account of their rides and walks about Elvanlees, and interspersing her history with many little anecdotes of "Charles's" doings and sayings. Constance liked to hear her talk and to watch her happy face, and was leaning back with her arm on the end of the couch, her head resting on her hand, when Captain Everington and Mr. Clifford stood before them; they had neither of them noticed the entrance of the gentlemen till that moment. Constance had had Gerard for her neighbour at dinner, and the conversation had been one of those so peculiarly interesting to her, which she so seldom had, but which left an impression never to be effaced: it was mind speaking to mind. They soon passed beyond that outer circle, where acquaintances generally meet and content themselves with remaining, and entered into an inner one, which is seldom pierced, though many often long for it, wearied with dwelling so long in such waste and trodden ground, while something within tells them of lovely flowers and bright blossoms that might be reached, could they but find the opening that would lead them into that inner and longed-for territory. Constance and Gerard had penetrated to it, and felt that there they met on common ground.

He was much graver than formerly, and at times an expression of sadness, almost pain, would come suddenly over him, and he would cease speaking abruptly, and give an inward sigh. The thought that he was sad only made Constance feel more interest in him; and when she spoke to him he would brighten up again, and answer her with an earnestness that shewed

that his apparent absence and sadness arose not from any want of interest.

When, hearing his and Captain Everington's step, she raised her eyes, she felt that his were fixed on her, though they were instantly withdrawn; and Captain Everington telling Gerard that he must make the acquaintance of his wife, he turned to speak to her. "We have had some memorable discussions together, Dora," was his mode of introducing him, "in his delightful studio; he invariably considered himself the conqueror, and always thought I had not a leg to stand upon, but though sometimes I might have felt myself a little disabled, I stoutly maintained my ground; and we'll vanquish him some day yet, now that I have you to help me."

The two gentlemen sat down,—Captain Everington beside Constance, and Gerard near Dora; they talked together for some minutes very animatedly and pleasantly, but they certainly entered not the inner circle.

Presently there was a little change in the grouping;—Lady Rockwood called Dora to shew her some present that had arrived for her after she left home; she summoned Captain Everington to admire; and Constance and Gerard were left alone. We will not say what they talked of, but when Lord Rockwood's voice said, rather loudly, "Shall we have no music to-night? You have been talking for the last half-hour over that bracelet, or necklace, or whatever it is, and I think must have fully discussed its merits,"—Constance and Gerard both thought the half-hour had gone by much quicker than half-hours usually do, and were in-

clined to disbelieve that more than ten minutes had elapsed.

There was music ; and Gerard looked graver than ever, and at the end of a song of Constance's, during which he had stood at the further end of the room, gazing at her with a look of absolute distress, he moved abruptly, went up to Lady Rockwood, and making some excuse for leaving so early, wished her good-evening. Constance did not notice what was passing, as Dora was standing beside her ; and when she moved from the piano, she found that Gerard was gone.

The next day, when she was ready to go out riding with her father, and only waiting for him to finish some letters, Mr. Clifford was announced. Mr. Montrevor came up as soon as he could, but he did not appear till Gerard had had ten minutes' talk with Constance.

" I see your horses at the door," he said, as Mr. Montrevor sat down ; " do not let me detain you."

" We shall have plenty of time for our ride. But you are on horseback too, are you not ? will you join us ? and we will set off together."

Gerard hesitated for a moment before accepting Mr. Montrevor's offer, and then said, " Thank you ; I should much like to take one turn in the park."

The one turn was multiplied into a good many, and then he left them almost as suddenly as he had done the night before at Lady Rockwood's. Constance thought the Park seemed very empty when he was gone, and had some difficulty in rousing herself to talk to a gentleman who took the place beside her which Gerard had vacated, and whom she had gene-

rally found one of the most agreeable of her ball-room acquaintances.

For several succeeding days Gerard Clifford found his way to the Park at the hour when Constance and her father rode, and each time he seemed more unwilling to leave her. His depression was less apparent, but there was often an excitement in his manner which gave an eagerness and eloquence to his words making them more than ever interesting to Constance.

One afternoon he rode with them to Lady Rockwood's, to see Dora and Captain Everington, before their departure the following day. When Constance and her father were shewn into the drawing-room, they found the whole party assembled; Dora flew to meet Constance, saying, "I am so glad you are come, Lily, for I know you will help me to persuade mamma to go with us to Dover to-morrow. I want her and Frances so much to go with us and see us off, and I think, if you will promise to come too, and Uncle Montrevor, she will; papa cannot, because he will be engaged in the House, and they will want some one to take care of them."

"Here's the very man for it," exclaimed Captain Everington, as he seized Gerard by the arm; "nothing gives him greater pleasure than to be a 'squire of dames,' which accounts for his incessant frequenting of balls and other fashionable entertainments; and I know I only echo the sentiments of his breast when I say that to have the charge of half-a-dozen ladies for the day would be esteemed by him one of the proudest moments of his life.—Cries of Hear, hear, and tremendous applause."

Lady Rockwood smiled as she said, "I think we shall reduce the onerous charge to half the half-dozen; and, indeed, if we persuade you to accompany us," she added, turning to Mr. Montrevor, "Mr. Clifford may perhaps be let off with one lady."

"Pray don't be modest, my dear fellow," interposed Captain Everington, before Gerard could speak; "we are all aware that you are anxious to profess yourself entirely unfitted for the honour, but charmed to have it laid upon you. Your services, such as they are, are at these fair ladies' disposal; you can only regret that one more worthy of the office could not be found, &c., &c."

"Really, Charlie, you display wonderful powers of elocution, and entirely express my feelings on this interesting occasion, but I am afraid"—

"Now we are not going to be put off with any of your engagements; I don't believe in any of them, and cannot think what on earth you do with yourself all day. For once, even if they are not all a myth, they might yield, I think, to the wishes of your friends."

Whether Captain Everington's persuasions would have succeeded, we will not say, but at the other end of the room a pair of large eyes, unconscious that they were seen, were raised for a moment to Gerard's face; their glance was not unobserved, and the result was that Mr. Clifford thought he could dispense for once with his engagements, and accompany them. Mr. Montrevor said he had no objection on his part to make to the plan, and he thought a day at the sea would be an excellent thing for Constance: so nothing remained but to settle the hour at which they would

start. All were in favour of going by an early train, and having a long day, and Bradshaw having been consulted, the morning express was decided on, and the party were on the point of separating, when General Lessington was announced.

"A recruit! a recruit!" Captain Everington exclaimed. "Forgive the liberty, General," he continued, as General Lessington stopped short, on hearing himself so addressed, "but we are making up a delightful party for Dover to-morrow, and I am sure we shall unanimously agree that it will be incomplete without you."

"Indeed it will," Constance and Dora both said; "you must go with us."

"Could I refuse two such petitioners were it on a voyage to the North Pole! But to blow off the smoke and soot of London with a sea-breeze at Dover will be very enjoyable, and I shall be delighted to be of the party."

"Then that being settled, Lily," Mr. Montrevor interposed, "we will leave your aunt to give all the necessary information to the General, and retire, for I remember, which I daresay you do not, that we have to dine out to-day."

They took their departure; Mr. Clifford did so also, and rode with them to their house.

"We shall meet at the station, then, to-morrow morning," Mr. Montrevor said, as he wished him good-bye, "unless you still fight off your engagement. I think you seem half-repenting that you have made it."

There was the sad, absent look on Gerard's face - which it had so often worn of late, and he answered as

if his thoughts were elsewhere, and in a grave tone, "It is too late now to retract."

"Lily, I confess that that man puzzles me," her father said, as they walked upstairs together; "I don't know if you can decipher the character; but it is beyond me. I like him well enough, but every now and then there is a strangeness about him that mystifies one."

"I think he seems out of spirits, papa, that's all."

"We'll hope the Dover excursion will benefit him then."

If Constance hoped so too she did not say so; but being met by her maid at the door of her room with the information that she had not half-an-hour to dress in, she proceeded at once to the mysteries of the toilette. The hair-dressing seemed rather a weary business, and she found herself often longing that the evening might be over, and the morning come.

CHAPTER IX.

"Never gazed the moon
Upon the water, as he'll stand, and read,
As 'twere, my daughter's eyes."

WINTER'S TALE.

THE morning came. At the appointed hour the different detachments drove up to the station, and soon found themselves seated in the train. They were too many for one carriage; Constance and her father, General Lessington and Gerard were together, but they were rather a silent party.

The two hours and a half were soon over, and, freed from the train, they immediately set forth on a walk. The steamer did not leave till four o'clock, so they had plenty of time to ramble about.

The sea looked so calm and beautiful, reflecting the blue vault of heaven, and the rippling waters sparkled as brightly as if the stars shone there instead of in their own azure home. Constance felt like a child in her enjoyment, and was impatient to reach the beach, but a walk to the top of Shakespeare's cliff being proposed, she willingly acceded. Mr. Montrevor gave his arm to Lady Rockwood, and Captain Everington and Dora walked by her side. General Lessington would have enjoyed appropriating Constance, but a charitable feeling overcame him as he saw Gerard's quick anxious glance at the place by her side, so he magnanimously offered his arm to Frances, and going on, left Gerard behind with Constance.

She was in such bright spirits that morning that the gravity on his face seemed like a cloud to her, and one which she longed for the sun's beams to disperse. She was that sun; and as he looked at her, and listened to the gay but gentle tones of her voice, his sad thoughts, whatever they were, seemed to melt away, and all was forgotten but the present moment and its rare enjoyment. For that it was enjoyment could never have been doubted, had Gerard's face been watched whilst he listened and responded to Constance's words. At first, flitting smiles and expressions of pleasure passed over it; but by degrees, as the conversation became more absorbing, there was a look of intense delight, with an earnest attention to her words, and an eager listening for the replies to questions only asked with the hope of drawing forth her inner thoughts. They reached the top of the cliff at last, though Gerard lingered as much as he could, and they found the rest of the party already arrived and seated on the grass. Captain Everington could not resist remarking to Gerard in a whisper, "You do not very much repent your disinterested generosity in giving up your pressing engagement, do you?"

Gerard made no reply, but muttering something about the fine view further on, walked away. Constance sat down by her father, who brightened up as usual at her approach. She pulled up some of the little wild flowers that were growing on the turf, and holding them in her hand, sat with her eyes fixed on the boundless ocean.

Dora whispered to her husband, "Oh, Charlie, look at her, is not that the picture? Did you ever

ask Mr. Clifford if he did not give the artist the design for 'Spring Flowers?' "

"No, but I know he must have done so."

"Ask him now."

"No, not now; I bothered him, poor fellow, a moment since by alluding to his engagements. I cannot think what has come over him."

"Where is he?" Dora asked, looking round.

"There, behind you in the distance, pacing the cliff like a sentinel, and pretending to be admiring the view. I wonder what *the picture* is dreaming of now, she seems quite absorbed."

"Don't speak to disturb her, I like looking at her so much. I often think there is the same pleasure in watching Lily's face as in watching a child, she always seems so entirely unconscious that she is observed."

Captain Everington smiled as he answered, "*I* think it is very pleasant to watch her cousin's admiration for her."

Captain Everington, it must be told, had made a full confession to Dora of his former admiration for Constance. It did not annoy her in the least to hear it, she thought it perfectly natural that every one should admire Constance. Ever since the summer they had passed together at Rockwood and Easthaven, when Constance had aroused her to a more rational life, she had conceived the greatest admiration for her, and she delighted in hearing her praised.

After they had rested a few minutes, they continued their walk. Gerard was instantly beside Constance, and the conversation that had been so absorbing before was resumed. He so often paused to listen to

her answers that they were left some way behind the rest of the party. Her father turned round to see where she was, and looked at them both with an anxious expression. For the first time it flashed across him that Gerard seemed to feel a more than ordinary interest in his child. Mr. Montrevor had looked upon him hitherto as a clever and somewhat eccentric man, who was too much taken up with his intellectual pursuits to care even to mix in society, and to whom the effort of paying attention to a young lady would have been most wearisome. But another view seemed dawning upon him now, and he could not withdraw the anxious gaze he bent upon his child.

They were standing still, Constance was speaking earnestly, her eyes cast down, and Gerard was leaning forward, his head bent to catch each word, and his whole attitude and expression shewing the most rapt attention. Mr. Montrevor forgot everything for the moment but these two beings. He was almost startled to see what a depth of feeling and varying emotions Constance's face betrayed. She was not now the joyous child, whose gleeful look he had so often likened to a sunbeam, but the thinking, feeling, sympathizing woman. And oh, what was the feeling? was it *love*, or only compassion? He almost felt as if he must draw near, and ask what thoughts were passing in her mind. He had never seen her look as she did now, he had never seen such feelings stirred up. All attention had hitherto seemed so indifferent to her,—what did this betoken?

Another had watched her with interest besides her father. Almost uneasy at thinking he had been in

some degree the means of bringing them together, General Lessington looked on Gerard Clifford and Constance.

He was an old man now, but in his youth he too had loved; and the memory of the sweet young wife who had brightened for one year his lonely pilgrimage with her gentle presence had never passed from his mind. It had, perhaps, more than anything drawn him towards Constance's father, in sympathy for a kindred sorrow. And as he looked on Gerard, remembering too that he had noticed, not only to-day, but for several days, his eagerness to be with Constance, his revived spirits when in her presence, and his depression when away from her, General Lessington said to himself, recalling his own feelings long since passed away, "Surely this is love;" and then began an anxious consideration, had he done right in urging Gerard to visit at Mr. Montrevor's? Was he the person worthy to possess such a treasure as he esteemed the Lily of Elvanlees to be? He longed to have a talk with her father, and to know whether his mind had been awakened to the apparent state of the case, and whether he viewed it with satisfaction and approval.

In a worldly position there would be no objection to Gerard. His fortune now was not very large, but he was heir to an uncle who had long been in a declining state of health, and whose name and large estate would pass to him. But had he been poor, and Constance had loved him, and he had been worthy of her love, General Lessington knew that her father would not have made any objection.

Mr. Montrevor longed, too, to talk to his old friend, and finding that Lady Rockwood and her daughter and Captain Everington were together, he moved aside, asked General Lessington to take a turn with him, easily managed to lead him to speak on the subject that was uppermost in his thoughts, and then began to ask his opinion of Gerard. All that General Lessington could say of him was quite satisfactory. He believed him to be an upright, honourable man, and that he had first-rate abilities none could doubt. So the father thought, but said not a word of his thoughts, that if this man should win his child's love, he must be glad and content to give her to him. He was vexed with himself for feeling that it would be a hard matter to be glad to part with her to any one; and then tried to laugh himself out of what might be only a trouble of his own imagination.

But when they joined forces again, and Constance, thoughtful and silent, came to his side, he drew her arm within his, and pressed her hand with a strong, nervous grasp, as if he would have kept her ever by him. She walked by his side down the hill, and to the hotel where they were going to take luncheon. Gerard joined Captain Everington and Dora, and seemed in such unusual spirits that his friend looked at him in some surprise; but Dora saw that the merriest speeches were followed by the gravest looks, and settled that he puzzled her more than ever, and that he was quite beyond her comprehension.

The hour for the travellers to go on board the steamer soon came, and with many little tender injunctions from her mother, and kind farewells from

all, Dora and her husband were left; and the rest of the party, after having staid some minutes on the pier, and watched the vessel getting under weigh, and taken last looks of Dora through opera-glasses, set off for the railway station.

As Captain Everington took his seat beside Dora, having comfortably enveloped her in shawls, and seized on a camp-stool to act the part of a footstool, he asked, "And what thoughts have taken possession of your mind, my little wife?"—he liked dwelling on that word.

"I was thinking about Mr. Clifford."

"What a confession!"

"No, Charlie, don't say that; I really was thinking of him, and of—"

"Of Miss Montrevor?"

"Yes, of Lily; what made you guess?"

"Does it seem so very unnatural to you to hear their names joined together? But tell me, what made you think of them?"

"I don't know. He watches Lily so intently when she does not see, and sighs and looks so strange and absent. Do you like him very much? I want you to tell me about him; I always feel half afraid of him, and cannot think how Constance can talk to him so naturally and easily. But then she is so much cleverer than I am. But now tell me all about him; have you known him long?"

"Oh yes, all my life nearly. We were at Eton together; he went to college and I into the army, so we lost sight of each other for a time; but when we met we were excellent friends, and of late years,

since he has taken to be so much in London, I have seen him constantly."

"And you like him very much?"

"Yes, very much; he is very clever, and has no conceit about him, and is a generous, warm-hearted fellow."

"Is he really? I don't think I should have thought so."

"Thought what, my little lady?"

"That he was warm-hearted."

"Why, do you fancy that people must have very loving manners to prove that they have warm hearts? We can't kiss each other, as you ladies do so pleasantly, and as our neighbours on the other side the water do."

"No, I don't want you to do that, but I should have thought Mr. Clifford was cold and satirical."

"The latter he may be, but not the former; and besides, his satirical manner is often put on when he feels anything deeply. My impression of Clifford is, and I think I know him well, that when once he loves he will love intensely, I was almost going to say fiercely. If I were a lady, I should like to have Gerard Clifford in love with me."

Dora gave a little affectionate, proud glance at her husband, as if she would say that she was quite contented to have him in love with her, and said, "I only hope he will make the lady happy with whom he does fall in love."

"And what makes you take such a sudden interest in the future object of his affections?"

"I don't know."

"Is that quite the truth?" he asked, with a sly look; "I suspect your little wise woman's heart tells you who that lady is to be."

"And do you think so too?"

"Think what, my love? Ah, ah! you have betrayed yourself."

"Well, Charlie, now that you do know what I mean, tell me what you think, you know him so well."

"I think that the lovely Lily is a very likely flower to fascinate our friend. She is so clever, and yet so childlike and simple, that I can well believe he finds it very delightful to converse with her; but I am not sure that I ever contemplated the possibility of Clifford's being seriously in love. I think it would do him a great deal of good."

This interesting conversation was interrupted by Dora confessing that she thought she had better lie down, and shut her eyes, as the steamer seemed to her to roll very much. Her husband judged that it would be unkind to remark that the sea was as calm as a mill-pond; but summoning the maid to bring her an extra cloak, he covered her up, and paced up and down the deck, considering what truth there might be in Dora's surmises.

Meanwhile the homeward-bound travellers had reached the station and taken their seats, Constance still keeping her place by her father's side. Gerard soon leant back in his corner, and from the changing expressions that passed over his face, it would have been thought that his inner mind was going through all the varying emotions that "visit that most strange

and curious instrument, the human heart." Once or twice he fixed on Constance an earnest, eager glance, betraying the intensest interest; but these glances were but momentary, and they left an expression of sadness on his face.

It was seven o'clock when the party arrived in London, and another half-hour elapsed before they reached their respective abodes. Mr. Montrevor declined Lady Rockwood's invitation to dinner, moved by a whispered entreaty from Constance, "Oh, papa, let us go home, I am so tired."

They went home, but they had to go to a party that evening; so the quiet which Constance longed for was delayed, or obtained but in snatches that would not allow her mind to recall in peace the events of the day, and seek an explanation of the strange and excited feelings that possessed it.

Night came at last, and once alone in her own room, she unlocked the treasury of thoughts that had been concealed in her heart, and brought the precious casket to the light to examine its contents. At first she almost shrank from drawing them forth, lest their value should diminish when scrutinized; but by degrees she drew them out,—and what did they tell her?

Their value did not lessen, for they whispered to that beating, trembling heart, a secret that made the blood rush to the cheeks, and the eyes brighten with joy.

When she met her father next morning in the dining-room at breakfast-time, he looked at her long and tenderly before he gave her his morning kiss, and when it was given it was with even more than his

7

:

4

1

f.

7

1'

h.

as

th.

he

bu.

po

hi-

an

wo

cha.

qu:

ma-

on,

"Oh, yes," she answered, eagerly; and then added, "we saw so much more of Dora."

But the earnest assent seemed to him not to have had much to do with Mrs. Charles Everington.

"I suppose no one has seen anything of Mr. Clifford this morning?" he continued, feeling rather guilty for trying to look into his young friend's heart. "He must have to make up for lost time now;" he turned to Constance as he spoke.

She did not turn aside; the colour might have deepened a little in her cheek, but her voice was quite calm, and had a very happy tone, as she said, "I have seen nothing of him."

"Do you find him as agreeable as he is generally reported to be?" Frances asked, in an indifferent tone, of General Lessington. "I cannot say I see so much to admire in him."

"I should not have thought his reputation for agreeableness was universal," was the answer. "I sometimes hear him accused of being proud and reserved; but I know none who can be more agreeable than Gerard Clifford, when he meets with one with whom he likes to converse."

"Then I suppose I am not one of the favoured few," Frances remarked, "for I never find I can talk to him."

The General perceived that he had made an unfortunate speech, and was meditating how to soften its ungallantness, when the entrance of Mr. Montrevor gave a fresh channel to the conversation. Frances soon took her leave, General Lessington staid for

luncheon, and accompanied Constance and her father on their ride.

As usual, they met Gerard; he was looking peculiarly grave and harassed, but at the sight of Constance his whole aspect brightened. General Lessington and her father felt they needed no further confirmation of their yesterday's surmises. That look could tell but one tale. But what a long train of anxious thoughts it awoke in the mind of him who had hitherto claimed as all his own that warm, young, loving heart. They rode long that day, not in the Park,—Rotten-row was then a most uncongenial scene,—but far away to Hampstead, Constance's favourite ride; and there side by side they rode on, forgetting all but that they were together. Gerard felt as if he would have liked that ride to last for ever, he longed never to be aroused from the delicious dreaming into which it plunged him. And it was with the look of one who has been recalled from some sweet vision to the dreary toil of life, that he started when Mr. Montrevor called to Constance that he thought it was time to turn homewards.

As they drew near the end of their ride, Gerard said to Constance, eagerly, "Can we not arrange a party to go somewhere out of London for a day, a long, delightful day, such as we had yesterday? London suffocates, oppresses one. I do not feel free, pent-up in its crowded streets."

"I always enjoy a day in the country," was the answer.

"You enjoyed yesterday?" he asked, looking ear-

nestly at her for a moment, and then withdrawing his eyes, as if he would conceal the anxiety with which he awaited her answer.

"Yes," she answered, calmly, softly, "it was a very pleasant day."

"It was one of those days that make one feel as if darkness covered the earth when it has passed," Gerard answered, with a sadness that startled Constance.

She looked at him half-wonderingly, half-timidly. What oppressed him thus? He tried to smile, but it was a smile that was sadder than a sigh, and said, "You will forgive me for speaking so strangely, you will not think of it. I may ride with you again to-morrow?"

Constance did not answer for a moment, and the imploring look which he bent upon her made her heart throb; she could not have defined the feeling that made her turn to her father and say, "Shall we ride to-morrow, Papa? Mr. Clifford would like to join us."

They reached home, and parted; and again did Constance seek the quiet of her own room, and muse bewilderingly over her own feelings and Gerard's sadness. There had been such a simple, pure pleasure to her in being with him, that his alternating joy and distress perplexed and pained her. And it was new, too, to find her heart so engrossed, and her mind ever turning to dwell on the words and thoughts of another; and yet that other had never asked for the right of thus absorbing her. But she did not think of this, she did not even consider whether he desired

that right; she *felt* that his heart longed to rest on hers, and she knew that she could cheer and soothe him, that his sadness vanished when she drew near,—what more did she require? She could have deemed her life well-spent if devoted to watch ever over him, to dispel his sorrow, to ward off trouble.

This evening passed away as many others had done. They went to two parties, and Constance was sought after and surrounded as usual; but she seemed to be living in a dream, she answered almost mechanically when spoken to, and had no distinct impression of anything that was passing. If a pause occurred, she was almost startled to find how instantaneously her mind had wandered far away, and had forgotten the present company.

When she lay down to rest that night, she did not, as of old, sink at once into a peaceful, childlike slumber, but lay awake, living over again the day at Dover and the ride to Hampstead, and dreaming the delicious, waking dream that the heart dreams but once, when love, true, deep, and requited, visits its calm nest.

The afternoon's ride was now the event of Constance's life; it was the hour of the day to which all others were made subservient; they were but the harbingers of its arrival, or the followers of its exit.

The horses were ordered as usual to-day, and they set out; but though the park was full, and the ride as crowded as ever, no Gerard Clifford awaited them, and his place beside her horse was soon occupied by one who would have given much for one smile or word of encouragement; but Constance, always too right-minded to encourage feelings which she could not

return, would have shrunk more than ever from doing so now, when her heart was beginning to know the intense but trembling joys of love. Next to Gerard, she would have preferred meeting General Lessington, for he was associated in her mind with him; but he too was not there, and rather weary and dispirited, after more than an hour's ride, Constance agreed to her father's proposal to return home.

In the drawing-room she found General Lessington,—“I thought you would soon be in, so I took the liberty of resting in your favourite arm-chair to await your return,” he said, after the first greetings were over. “Have you had a pleasant ride?”

“I found it rather hot,” Constance answered, untying her hat; “I thought we should have met you?”

“I have been at the Horse-Guards on business for a friend, and was obliged to stay at home and answer a week's letters after I came in. I found one from Gerard Clifford among them.”

“Is he out of London, then?” Constance asked.

“Yes; when he came in yesterday from his ride, he found a letter, which by some blunder had not been delivered in the morning, to announce the death of his uncle.”

“Was it expected, and did he care much for him?” she asked, thinking how she would have felt if her Uncle Edward's death had been announced.

“He has long been in quite a helpless state from paralysis, and unable to hold much intercourse with others, so that his death will not have been a shock to Mr. Clifford. You know, perhaps, that he will succeed to his property and take his name.”

"No, I know nothing of it. But will he have to change his name?" she asked, in rather a troubled tone. "I think it must be so unpleasant to change one's name. It must seem like giving up one's past life, in a degree."

General Lessington laughed, and said, "You would not find many to sympathize with you in your opinion, I think, as most ladies have an objection to keeping their own names very long."

Constance smiled, and answered, "I was not thinking of that. What will Mr. Clifford's name be?"

"Aubrey; do you like it as well as Clifford? I am not sure that Gerard Aubrey sounds as well as Gerard Clifford."

To Constance's ear it certainly had not the same pleasant sound, and till she had learnt to identify it with him, the other would be the name that had the spell to awaken happy thoughts.

General Lessington sat on for some little time, and spoke of the fine property to which Gerard would succeed. He remembered it, having visited there many years past, and had a clear recollection of a beautiful park and large house. "Gerard Clifford's mother was living then," he continued, "and he was a little boy staying there with her; she was the only sister of the Mr. Aubrey who is just dead, and Gerard was her only child,—the only child in the family, for Mr. Aubrey had none. So it has been long known that he would be his uncle's heir. He will have to take his name as expeditiously as possible, for old Mr. Aubrey could not bear the idea of the name being extinct, and I quite wonder he did not get Gerard to

take it before his death. However, I have no doubt everything will have been drawn up for him to assume it without delay."

Constance would have liked to ask whether Mr. Clifford would be long away from London; but it was one of those questions which, though framed in imagination, is withheld by some inexpressible sensation from passing into words, and General Lessington left, and it was not asked.

CHAPTER X.

"It was not that I meant to tell . . .
But thou art wise and guessest well."

THE LADY OF THE LAKE..

A WEEK passed away. A week of restless London life, with its hurrying to and fro, its ceaseless business, its round of amusements, its great joys and crushing sorrows. Friends met with smiling faces, talked together on the events of the day, laughed, danced, marvelled, may be, at each other's gaiety, and knew nought of the under-current that flowed on still and deep, uninfluenced by the sunbeams that played on the surface.

Constance was one of those now, who let nothing but the surface of her heart be seen. She had accidentally overheard it remarked that Miss Montrevor would feel dull when the only one of her attendants whose society seemed to give her pleasure was away; and somewhat startled at finding she had let her own inmost thoughts be detected, she determined that they should be read no further. No one should look over that secret record which she herself never ventured to study. So she was unusually gay, forcing herself to talk and smile, and appear in excellent spirits; but in reality weary of her efforts, and of the amusements in which she took part.

If some were deceived by her forced gaiety, one heart there was which read hers truly, and from the

depth of its affection understood each passing weary look, heard each smothered sigh. And to that one heart alone, her father's, Constance longed to unburden hers, but could not. What woman can speak of love which, though fully returned, has been unsought in words? Had she had a doubt of Gerard's feelings towards her, she had crushed her affections, or hidden them for ever in her inmost heart; but his manner, his look had told as much as words could have said, and she fully believed him, yet could never have alluded to that belief. Still she felt that her father understood her, and there was much sympathy between them. Their rides were generally taken together without other companions, and when at home Constance sat much with him in the library, and did not pass her mornings alone as she had usually done. She knew not why she clung to him more than ever now, and watched even more than was her wont, that she might do for him any little kind office that lay in her power.

They spoke, perhaps, less than usual; but as she sat beside him, he would often take her hand and press it in his own for a moment, and many times when she thought he read, his eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of sadness, which he would not let her perceive.

The week passed—a long week it seemed to Constance. One morning she sat alone in the drawing-room, playing snatches of old songs, and sometimes singing a verse, when some one knocked at the door; imagining it to be her maid, she said, "Come in," without turning her head, and went on with her song.

But the step aroused her, and a voice said, "I hope I am not disturbing you, but Mr. Montrevor gave me leave to come up."

Constance rose quietly from the piano; she did not speak at first, for her voice might have trembled a little, but she gave a happy smile, and moved to the sofa, while Gerard drew a chair and sat down beside her. They talked on indifferent subjects, he told her that he had come with General Lessington, who was down stairs with her father, but that he had ventured on asking leave to go and see her. All the time he spoke his lip quivered slightly, and he seemed making a strong effort to control his agitation. She could speak quite calmly now, and she answered in the tone of quiet gladness that seemed ever to soothe him; its spell was not unfelt, but still he spoke with an effort: "You were singing as I came in," he said, "will you sing one song now? I have not heard any music for more than a week, it seems such a long time."

"If you really like it," she answered; "what shall it be?" She turned over the pages of her song-book, and came to 'Excelsior;' she paused a moment, as she always did at that song, it had many associations. Gerard thought she meant to sing it; "Not that," he said hurriedly, "not that now." He turned over the leaves quickly, and his eye fell on "Dream on, young hearts." "Will you sing that?" he asked.

"Is it a favourite of yours?"

"I like to hear you sing it."

"I always feel grave when I sing it; yet I suppose one is not meant to feel so."

"Why should you, your heart has always had a bright dream, has it not?"

"Yes, too bright to last I believe, I think," she answered, with a smile.

"And am I coming as a cloud across it?" he murmured, so low that she hardly caught the words, and did not feel as if they were intended for her to hear. "But you will sing it," he said, eagerly; "sing it, and oh, keep your bright happy dream."

She sang it, and he stood behind her, where she could not see him, his lips firmly pressed, and his hands clenched. When she finished he did not speak, he did not even thank her for it, but stood in the same fixed attitude. She left her seat at the piano, and went to the sofa; still he stood on, watching her, but as if withheld by some irresistible fascination from moving.

His manner surprised her, and to break the strange silence, she made some remark. He did not answer her, but suddenly moved with hasty steps to where she sat, and stood before her. She raised her eyes, but they sank instantly as they met his gaze so sad, so earnest, so full of intense feeling. He seemed striving for some moments for utterance, but at last words came, deep, low, tremulous. They revealed such a depth of passionate affection, such quivering anxiety, such overpowering emotions, that Constance's impulse as she heard them was to turn aside and weep. She could not speak, and as he bent forward, looking imploringly for an answer, she half raised her face, and the tearful eyes met his; for a moment he mistook their meaning, and a look of agony came over him.

which Constance could never have borne to look upon again. But it changed instantly, there was no mistaking the second glance into those eyes, and though no words would come, he doubted not of his bliss. It seemed too much for him to realize. Again and again, as he tightly clasped her hand, he repeated the words, "Can it be true?" whilst he looked in her face, as if he drank in draughts of joy at every glance.

An hour passed, and yet they sat on, in hushed, subdued converse, the stillness of intense joy too deep for words, altogether unconscious how time went; forgetful that the world contained any other beings than themselves, or that its limits extended further than the spot where they sat. That was their world now, they were to each other its sole inhabitants.

They were aroused at last from their blissful trance by one of the sounds of daily life that are unheeded at ordinary moments, but which seem to come with a harsh, jarring crash, as if they belonged to another world, when they break in upon any deep emotions, whether of joy or sorrow.

It was a thundering double knock which made them both start; Constance rose hastily, "I cannot see any one," she said, "I must go."

"Oh do not keep me long out of your sight, it is life to me," Gerard hastily murmured; "I must come again, very, very soon. But your father, I have said nothing to him, will he forgive me? You must tell all."

He had time for nothing more but a hurried farewell, for Constance flew up-stairs.

The visitors who arrived so inopportunately were Lady Rockwood and Frances. The latter ran up to the drawing-room, whilst her mother waited in the carriage, to ask Constance if she would accompany them to a morning concert. She opened the door, and without observing Mr. Clifford, finding Constance was not there, went on up to her room. Constance tried to look very calm, but felt sure she did not succeed, and refused with such decision the offer of the morning concert, that Frances said, in a half annoyed tone, "We thought you would have enjoyed it, as you are so fond of music."

Constance assured her that she should have enjoyed it exceedingly, but could not possibly go to-day; and Frances, saying she must not keep her mother waiting, took her departure, exclaiming as she kissed her, "Why, Lily, how your cheeks burn, what have you been doing? I call it quite a cool day."

She did not wait for the answer to this question, which would probably have come with some difficulty, but ran down stairs, and left Constance to the relief of solitude.

She was alone with her thoughts, with her treasure: who can describe the meditations of that solitary hour, the trembling joy, the happiness too great to be believed! For this was no girlish fancy, no romantic affection, but love, such as the heart gives but once on earth, and in giving, paves the way to intense joy, or the deepest misery. But Constance thought of no future, the present was all to her now. Gerard loved her,—loved her with a love as deep, as intense as her own. Nay, the intensity of his love had made all her

former feelings seem but cold regard. She knew not that maidenly reserve restrained them from coming forth in all their depth and fulness, till his words had given them a right to be indulged.

Again she let time pass by all unheeded, till a voice at the door aroused her, "May I come in, my child?" said her father. The door opened, Constance sprang from her seat, and without saying a word, threw her arms round his neck, and hiding her face on his shoulder, clung to him trembling. For some moments he clasped his arms round her, and held her in silence; but at last he gently disengaged them, raised tenderly the drooping, burning face, and tried to calm his voice while he said, "My child, is it so, he loves you then?"

Constance hid her face again on his shoulder, but made no answer; for the first time since Gerard had spoken, it flashed across her, that parting from her father would be the result. No interpretation of her silence was needed, or of the throbbing heart which beat so quickly against the arm that encircled her. With a tenderness more like a woman's than a man's, he spoke gently and lovingly to her, soothed her, and waited till she could tell in broken sentences and half-whispered words her history.

A nervous apprehension oppressed him as he realized the depth of her love, lest he to whom it was given should be in any way unworthy of it. She had given her happiness from his into another's keeping now;—would it be guarded with such watchful care? Would the preservation of it be ever considered the object of most importance, or after the first novelty was over

would it be made subservient to another's, and be considered simply when that other's was gratified, and it could be procured without any self-denial or trouble? As these thoughts flashed across him, he felt that the bitterest trial of life would be to see her sorrowing, and yet to have no longer the power to comfort her. But he checked these mournful fancies, he would not dim his child's bright dream of joy with any looks of sadness, and again he turned to her to murmur words of tenderness.

That afternoon Constance and her father felt that they must be alone. In a ride they could not be secure from companions; so, contrary to their usual custom, the carriage was ordered, and they set off for a drive. They said but little to each other, for both hearts were too full for much speaking; but there is a silence "when hearts are of each other sure," that is as much intercourse as words would be; and that drive was soothing to them both.

When the next morning came, and Constance awoke from her sleep, it was with the feeling that some undefinable joy was at hand; and she almost feared to rouse herself to think what it was, lest it should be but a dream, and vanish away.

Breakfast had not been long over, before a knock was heard at the door, a sound that sent the colour into her cheeks, and made her heart give a bound of joy. Gerard's first visit this morning was to Mr. Montrevor, but the father would not long detain him, knowing that minutes were numbered as hours now by the two expectant hearts, and ere long Constance heard a knock at the drawing-room door. It was not

again mistaken, and he hardly waited for the permission to come in, but was by her side in an instant. He stood beside her, holding both her hands in his, and gazing with a deep, earnest gaze, into the large eyes that were raised to meet his with such a trusting, loving expression. "Mine, mine," he murmured, as if he wished to assure himself of the reality of his own happiness, and his face had even now a tinge of sadness. But Constance smiled, and joy seemed to come with that smile. The hours flew by, as they sat together, reading more deeply each other's heart. Gerard longed to know all the life of the bright young being who sat beside him, and asked her question after question concerning her early days; and as her cousins were mentioned, he learnt, in the quiet voice in which she talked of them, and the evident, equal interest and regard felt towards both, how unfounded had been his suspicions of her love for Eustace. With the impulse of the moment when he first perceived this, he was going to tell her of his thought; but it suddenly flashed across him that he had not been mistaken in Eustace's feelings, and it would be unfair to him to mention what he had evidently never divulged, and would surely cause her pain, so he stopped the words that were almost uttered.

She asked him no questions of the past; once she told him that his sadness had pained her, and asked if it had passed now, and he answered with a look of earnestness, that made the words, impassioned as they were, seem cold compared to it, that as long as she loved him, sorrow and sadness could not come near; her love was more to him than the whole world, he

seemed as if he were in a new earth, which had an atmosphere of its own, untroubled by storms and tempests when with her. His passion almost made her tremble. Was it she, a poor weak child of earth, who inspired such emotions, and did not his words seem to find an echo in her heart as he uttered them? Was there not something almost fearful in such love? It was but a momentary reflection, for he spoke again, and her attention was instantly absorbed.

When the luncheon hour arrived, Mr. Montrevor stopped the servant who was on his way to the drawing-room to announce it, and went up himself. As he came in, Constance rose from her seat, and turned to him, threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him, while her eyes filled with tears. He pressed her hand, and whispered, so that she alone heard it, "My child, my darling," and then turned and spoke to Gerard.

None knew how that morning had been passed by him, and none, he was resolved, should ever know what it was to him to think of losing her who had been the companion and comfort, the one object of interest, for nearly twenty years of his life. But the thought that he would be alone, when she chose another companion for herself, was the one drop of sadness in Constance's cup of joy.

CHAPTER XI.

"I ask thee not to think of me, as now once more we part ;
Another reigns supreme, I know, on that near throne, thy heart :
The words of love I fain would breathe unspoken still remain ;
I know thou lov'st another, and my humble love is vain."

LORD JOHN MANNERS.

THE announcement of Constance's engagement caused no surprise. Gerard's devotion to her had been generally observed ; and that she received his attentions without reluctance was a sufficiently unusual event not to pass unnoticed. Therefore Lord and Lady Rockwood, General Lessington, and others, received the information with the remark, "I fully expected it."

But those who had not watched the progress of the attachment, and had only, by the casual mention of his name, known that Gerard Clifford was a visitor at the house, could not be expected to be prepared. And it was with a feeling of almost painful surprise that Mr. Edward Montrevor received a letter from his brother informing him of the engagement. He took it to Aunt Mabel, preparing her beforehand for its contents ; perhaps (though neither made any remark on the subject) what Eustace would feel was the thought at the first moment uppermost in their minds. Aunt Mabel's, however, quickly turned to Constance, and there was a yearning desire to be with her, and see in her face, and hear her own voice tell,

that her happiness was as great as could be desired for her.

She tried to recall Mr. Clifford to her mind, but her acquaintance with him had been made during the few days that he had staid at the Rectory, at the time when Eustace was so ill. Her thoughts had been then too much engrossed with Eustace to enable her to give them to anything else, so that she could recollect nothing more of Mr. Clifford than that he had been universally pronounced very clever and agreeable, and her efforts to bring him vividly to her mind were quite unavailing. She could not rest till she had seated herself at her desk to write a long letter to Constance.

Eustace had left Torquay. He and Harry had enjoyed the time they had passed there together. It had been of use to them both. The exertion of cheering Harry, and drawing him out of his gloomy thoughts, had helped Eustace to forget his own troubles, and Eustace's high principles and calm acquiescence in sorrow from which there was no relief, had taught his friend that, though oppressed with grief, the heart may find a source of strength and courage within itself.

When the time arrived for Eustace to leave Torquay, he persuaded Harry to let him accompany him to Wales. He did not wish to lose sight of his friend, and felt that the only means of restoring intimacy between the families would be to go himself and see poor Mrs. Sedgeleigh and her daughter. He feared, too, that if Harry went alone, the cure which the change to Torquay had commenced in his mind and spirits would be retarded ; so he persuaded his friend

that nothing would do him so much good as some bracing mountain air after the mild, relaxing climate of Torquay. He ascertained that there was a little village inn within five minutes' walk of Mrs. Sedleigh's cottage, where he could take up his abode; so he and his trusty squire Joseph, who was not at all satisfied with the plan, fully anticipating that Mr. Eustace would fall ill again, accompanied Harry to the wild, beautiful spot which he had chosen for his sister's home.

Ada and her mother had lived there in entire seclusion for the last year, and it was quite an event to them to meet any friend of former days. Ada had rejoiced for Harry's sake that his intimacy with the Montrevors was re-established, but she had not anticipated that she should be any sharer in the pleasure of intercourse with them. Their small income had made her banish from her mind all thoughts of moving from their present abode, and she considered that they were too much out of the world to receive any chance visits from former friends, even had the place of their abode been known. Therefore when she received her brother's letter, telling her who would be his companion, she felt quite bewildered. Her mother made many lamentations over their altered circumstances, when told of the intended visit, and thought it was inconsiderate of Harry to bring any one to see them when they were so little in a position to receive visitors.

Ada, however, smoothed all difficulties, and before the day arrived her mother was looking forward quite with pleasure to the little excitement of seeing a new

face, and had looked over Ada's wardrobe several times to decide which would be the most fitting dress for her to appear in on the occasion.

Ada decked their little drawing-room with fresh flowers, and for Harry's sake took every pains to make the room look pretty. The lovely, romantic view from the windows must, she thought, atone for the simplicity of the internal decorations, and she was delighted that the evening of their arrival was bright and sunshiny, so that the mountains glowed with purple and rosy tints, and the fields looked rich and luxuriant in their clothing of green.

Eustace was delighted with the scenery, and the prettily situated little cottage, and deeply touched with Ada's gentle gaiety and cheerfulness, ever watching to chase away all shadows from the hearts of those two beings who seemed to look to her for comfort.

Her life had not been a sad one, though sorrow had shadowed her path. She had tried Aunt Mabel's rule of never allowing herself to long for what was withheld; and she had made many occupations for herself in her quiet home. She was a most welcome visitor at every cottage within reach; and in order that she might be of more use, she had set herself diligently to learn Welsh. She often astonished her brother and Eustace by the ease with which she would converse with the little wild children and poor cottagers who met them on their long rambles,—for they explored every mountain and valley within reach. Eustace, however, was generally obliged to condescend to mount a rough Welsh pony on these expeditions, as his strength would not allow him to take long walks.

One morning they had settled on making an unusually long expedition, but just as Eustace was finishing breakfast, which he always took at his little inn, a packet of letters was brought in. They were the first he had received from home, and he opened and read one from his father, and another from Percy, before he observed that there was one from London. He was not at all familiar with his uncle's writing, and had not recognised it now. He opened it, and read it, and a little note enclosed, without pausing to draw his breath, and then let them both fall on the table and leant back in his chair, covering his eyes with his hand. It was some minutes before he recollected himself, and then it was with a great effort that he did so. The words, "It is over at last," came with one of those deep sighs that the heart seems compelled to give after any great shock, before it can continue to beat.

He took up the letters, read the little note again, and murmured, "Oh, Lily, Lily, if your happiness is secured by this, I will be content."

She had written to him herself, little knowing the pain her words would cause, but thinking that he would like to hear from her, and knowing how much he liked Gerard, she fancied that it would give him pleasure to look forward to the connection. She alluded to this in her note, and spoke of her own great happiness, and said she could not help writing to him herself, because they had always felt as a brother and a sister to each other.

It was a little natural note, written as she would have spoken; but no impassioned eloquence could

have had power to stir up the depths of Eustace's heart as that little note, almost childlike in its naturalness and simplicity, had.

He had tried to repress all feelings of love for Constance, and had succeeded in keeping them in a state of quiescence, and had hoped that they were in a measure subdued. It was not till aroused by the shock of knowing that she had passed for ever from him, that he awoke to the consciousness how intense his love had been, how it had entwined itself with every fibre of his heart, grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength. Now it was to be a thing of the past. If before it had seemed to him wrong to cherish it, now it would be actually sinful, when her faith was solemnly pledged to another. For a moment a feeling of repugnance, almost hatred, towards Gerard arose in his heart. He turned with absolute loathing from the picture his imagination conjured up—another filling the place which he had so yearned to fill. But this was but for a moment:—he knew that such a feeling must be crushed in its birth; if indulged, it would warp his whole moral nature. To gain time to struggle against it, he must banish for a little while all thoughts of Constance from his mind,—he must seek a strength above his own.

In a few moments the recollection of his engagement with Harry and Ada flashed across him. It was impossible that he could fulfil it now; he must have, at least, some hours of quiet. He collected his thoughts to write hastily a few words to Harry, to say that he had had letters that would require answering, and must beg them to excuse him from accompany-

ing them this morning, and then sat like one stupified, and feeling as if he dared not rouse himself to full consciousness. For more than an hour he sat in his little sitting-room, unable to write or to think; then a longing for air and freedom coming over him, he rang the bell, and ordering the pony he was in the habit of riding, set off, without saying where he was going or when he should return. He made for a steep hill that rose behind the village, on the summit of which was an open common or down.

He kept his mind in the same state of inaction till this was gained, and then dismounting and tethering the pony by the bridle, he threw himself on the grass on a point which commanded the most extensive view, and tried calmly to realize the intelligence that had reached him. At first he would not trust himself to think at all about Gerard, but tried to remember only that Constance was engaged to be married, and had told him she was happy. It was but at first that he shrunk from viewing the whole case; by degrees he taught himself to endure it all, and forced himself to own that it was only what he fully expected; he had never in his inmost heart believed that she would be his. What must have come sometime had but come now, he tried to think.

The effort of summoning these thoughts, the greatest and most painful effort, was of incalculable benefit to him. The overcoming at once feelings that would have been sinful if indulged, was a victory gained, after a fierce contest indeed, but it was gained, and he stood not now where he stood before. He had come to another point in life, a place where two ways met;

one a sharp, difficult ascent, the other an easy, downward path: he chose the former, and in so doing, made a great advance on his upward journey. But it was not without much exhaustion of physical strength that this mental exertion had been made. And when, after a lapse of some hours, he prepared to return to the inn, it was with difficulty that he could bear the motion of the pony, as he descended by the rough mountain-path,—a winter water-course.

Harry came to see him in the course of the afternoon, and was pained and perplexed at his altered aspect; but as Eustace was preparing to write when he came in, he did not remain. After many vain attempts, a note to Constance was completed; it seemed cold and formal when finished, but he could not help it. He was obliged to keep such a restraint over his thoughts and heart in writing that he hardly felt as if the letter were his own, it was more like one written at the dictation of another. As he directed and sealed it, the thought flashed across him with what indifference it would be received if Gerard were standing by; but that thought was not indulged.

The afternoon was a very weary one. He stretched himself on some chairs and tried to read, or rather held a book in his hand, and declined Harry's pressing invitation to come and rest in their little drawing-room. He could only lie still; talking was too great an exertion just then; and so the long evening wore away, till earlier than usual, thoroughly exhausted, he went to his room, and had the comfort (of all earthly blessings the greatest at such seasons) of dreamless sleep.

The letter which had cost him such suffering reached its destination the following morning, and was laid, with a heap of others, on the dining-room table. How little conscious was any one of the aching heart that had dictated it! But it was not received with the indifference he had anticipated, though Gerard was there; but it was taken up eagerly, and read with deep interest. Gerard's eyes watched Constance as she read it; and as she laid the letter down, and looked thoughtful for a moment, he almost longed to seize upon it, and know who had caused her even a passing shade of sadness.

Mr. Montrevor had given him a *carte blanche* invitation to the house, and he seemed inclined to make the fullest use of it, for he was seldom absent. At first he restricted himself to eleven o'clock for coming, but latterly some convenient excuse had continually brought him to the house before breakfast; and from the time he came till he left he seemed literally hardly able to bear Constance out of his sight. If she left the drawing-room to go to her father's room for half-an-hour, he paced restlessly up and down, and when she returned, there was a look of such trouble and distress on his face that it pained and perplexed her, though it always gradually disappeared as she sat, calm and gentle, beside him.

Once she asked him why he was thus troubled, for his distress bewildered her, there was such peace and joy in her love. He did not at first answer her, and the hand that clasped hers seemed to give a convulsive start, while the brow was contracted; but at length the words came eagerly, "Forgive me, dearest, for-

give me. I cannot tell you what I feel. You are my only brightness; without your presence it is dark,—all dark and bewildering.”

She looked anxious for a moment; these outbreaks of passionate feeling gave her a trembling sensation; but a sad look was never allowed to dwell on her face, and his words of affection and distress at having caused it soon chased it away.

It was now the end of June. London had become oppressively hot, and Constance and Gerard longed to be spending the long evenings in happy rambles in the country. Mr. Montrevor was quite willing to agree to their suggestions, that it was time to leave London, though he had a strange, sad feeling upon him, that all places would be alike to him now. Some alterations which he had desired to be made in the offices at Elvanlees, were not quite completed, so that their return there must be delayed for a little time; and the advisableness of going to the sea-side for a fortnight was under discussion one morning, when Lord Rockwood called with an open letter in his hand, and a note for Constance.

“Here’s a strange proposition from Dora,” he remarked, as he gave her the note; “she is bent on our all joining them on the Rhine, where she and Everington now are. She is in raptures with the scenery, which is new to her, and says if we will come at once, we shall be beforehand with the stream of tourists, and may amuse ourselves very well for a fortnight, and not be overrun with our fellow-countrymen. That, however, I am inclined to doubt, in such a highway for tourists; but still, I do not know that it need be

an insuperable barrier to our going, if any one be disposed. What do you say, Lily?"

She looked at Gerard for a moment before she answered, her own opinion was clear to her,—to travel anywhere would be delightful; and she seemed to have gleaned his in that momentary glance, for she said, eagerly, "I should like it exceedingly; but what do you think, Papa? it will none of it be new to you."

"Almost, my child, I think, for it is more than twenty years since last I looked on the wide and winding Rhine," he answered, and thought, though he said it not, that he hardly felt like the same being, who had travelled with his betrothed through those lovely scenes with a bounding, rejoicing heart, three and twenty years ago. A whole life seemed to have been lived since then.

"But shall you be able to leave London now?" he asked of Lord Rockwood, after some moments' pause.

"Yes," was the answer. "I think I can get away, and my wife has quite a restless longing to see her little Dora again. We did not know how much we should miss her till she was gone:" he checked himself suddenly there, at Mr. Montrevor's pained expression, and proceeded to talk about the arrangements for their tour. To cross to Antwerp was proposed; Lord Rockwood protested against the long passage, but the rest of the party laughed at his vehemence:—they could take the rail to Brussels, they said, stay there a few days, and then proceed to Cologne, and go by the steamer to Godesberg, where Dora would await their arrival.

To Constance the plan was delightful ; she had often longed to go abroad, but her father's disinclination for it had checked the expression of this desire ; now it came like the fulfilment of a childhood's dream of happiness.

Lord Rockwood staid some time talking, and ere he had left, the plan had assumed a definite form. Mr. Montrevor proposed, and was warmly seconded, that General Lessington should be asked to be of the party. The Rockwoods had engagements for at least ten days, some of which, Lord Rockwood feared, it would be difficult to dispense with ; but after that time he thought they could get away, and as Mr. Montrevor said they had refused almost all invitations lately, and had nothing to prevent their going in a few days, it was decided that the Montrevors should set off at once, and wait at Godesberg, or elsewhere on the Rhine, for the rest of the party.

General Lessington was easily persuaded to accompany them. He felt much for Mr. Montrevor in the prospect of losing his daughter ; and besides, that daughter's history had hitherto been so very interesting to him that he longed to read more of it. So all was arranged, and in a few days they found themselves on board a steamer, wending their way through the forest of masts to the mouth of the Thames. All was new to Constance, and she was in very bright spirits. None of the party cared for the long passage, as fortunately all were good sailors. Gerard had at first one of his fits of depression, which even still at times haunted him, but it did not last.

When Mr. Montrevor and General Lessington

paced the deck together, and he was alone beside Constance, nothing but happiness could be felt, and the day, to most of the passengers such a weary one, was to them a long bright summer hour.

As night approached, and the lovely moon came softly forth, and shed her wondrous light over the rippling waves, Gerard and Constance's happiness increased. On both, the solemn beauty of the scene had great effect; and as Gerard watched the face, that looked so marble white in that pale, pure light, and marked the earnest eyes which gazed with such rapt admiration, awhile on the cloudless moon, and then on the silver path in the dark ocean, he again murmured to himself as he bent over her, "Mine, mine."

It was very late before any of the party were inclined to leave a scene of such calm loveliness, and endure the discomforts of 'the shades below;' but at twelve o'clock Mr. Montrevor feared he must break in on that dream of happiness, and dismiss Lily to the cabin. Had she known how restlessly and gloomily Gerard paced the deck for hours after she left him, she would have found it more difficult to comply readily with her father's wish.

The delicious freshness of a bright sunny morning is perhaps never more appreciated than by those who have passed a night in the hot, oppressive cabin of a steamer. Constance, thanks to her maid's laudable exertions, came up on deck looking as fresh as she would have done if she had walked into the dining-room at Elvanlees, and a figure that was stretched on a bench with a railway wrapper for a blanket, sprang up at her approach, as if that sight awoke him to life.

and joy. Sleep had not visited Gerard that night, but everything save the present moment was forgotten when Constance was near.

Antwerp was soon reached, the custom-house in course of time passed through, and all set off to explore the cathedral and the pictures. And Constance felt as if she entered on a new world, when Gerard began to talk, as she thought he alone could talk, on art and its influences. He was more eloquent than ever, those speaking eyes kindled his enthusiasm, and were more exciting than the most rapturous applause of the most intelligent audience, and his words and thoughts seemed to grow under their influence.

"You have enjoyed this first day of your tour?" General Lessington asked, as they assembled for a *thé complet* at the hotel in the evening.

"Oh yes, more than I could have imagined," was the answer.

Early next morning they were in the train *en route* for Brussels. Constance's lively comments on passing objects roused Gerard into more than his wonted animation. Brussels was even more interesting than Antwerp,—its quaint, narrow streets, with the curious, many-gabled houses, its fine old churches and Hotel-de-Ville, with its graceful spire, were all objects of attraction. Two or three days were passed in exploring, and it was but the recollection that Captain Everington and Dora were awaiting their arrival, that made them move on at last.

It was late in the evening when they reached Bonn,

where they landed, and drove in an open carriage to Godesberg.

The sight of the Seven Mountains filled Constance, whose eyes had not yet looked on Switzerland, with admiration; and her freshness of feeling and genuine delight made the rest of the party fully enjoy the scene.

At the hotel at Godesberg, they found Dora and Captain Everington, Dora looking happy and pretty, and full of pleasure at meeting Constance. She had heard of her engagement, and though she could not quite get over her fear of Gerard, she was fully prepared to like him for Constance's sake. Soon after their arrival the two ladies retired to their rooms, and though Constance could not speak much of her happiness, her looks, and the few words she did say, fully satisfied Dora that it was as great as she could have wished, and she on her part assured Constance that she had never been so happy in her whole life as she was now. When her woman's curiosity led at last to the question, "Was it to be a long engagement?" she was rather startled to find that Constance evidently had thought little, if at all, of its termination, and when pressed on the subject, said,—“Oh, don't ask me, Dora,—not for a long, long time.”

It was quite true that nothing had been said at all on the subject of the marriage to her yet. Gerard had felt, when he once made some allusion to her leaving home, that she could not bear it yet, and had forbore to press the point; but it was the greatest

effort to him to refrain. He would have liked the marriage to follow instantly on the engagement, and was each day watching feverishly an opportunity to persuade Constance to allow the day to be fixed.

When they returned to the sitting-room, the gentlemen had all walked out on the balcony, and were standing gazing on the lovely view. Constance and Dora soon joined them, and there they remained, with but little intermission, till eleven o'clock at night. It was an evening of intense enjoyment to Constance and Gerard, as they sat there in the calm moonlight. Once, as the clock of the little village church, which was hidden among the ruins of the neighbouring castle, slowly tolled forth the hour, and its solemn sound seemed to bring thoughts of another world, a trembling awe stole over Constance. That other world seemed to her now a far-off and unknown land, and the present one was so absorbing, so happy, so precious to her, that the very thought of parting with it, and the happiness that was within her grasp, came over her as a funeral knell might come if heard at a marriage-feast. But the thought would come, was she drawing nearer to, or further from, that land which to her seemed very far off, and yet to some so very near?

"Lily, to-morrow we will climb that mountain and sit there, and watch the sun set over the old castle of Rolandseck, and you shall sing me Schiller's ballad, the Ritter Toggenburg,—will we not?"

Where were the thoughts now, when that voice sounded in her ear?

To ascend one of the hills was the wish of others,

besides Gerard, so that an expedition was arranged the following day. The Drachenfels was the only one of which the name was familiar to Constance and Dora, but Gerard knew them well, and proposed the ascent of the Löwenberg as being higher, and also more interesting scenery. The ladies felt valiant, and thought their strength equal to the walk; but it was decidedly agreed that two donkeys were to follow, so that they might mount whenever they felt weary. The morning was lovely, and soon after breakfast, arrangements having been made for a cold luncheon to be sent with them, the whole party set forth. They drove to the water's edge, crossed the river, selected the donkeys that were to form the rear-guard, and proceeded on their way.

As their path led them more and more into the midst of the hills, the scenery became more interesting. There was a wildness and a loneliness about it that gave it a peculiar charm; and as the two who were the last of the little party lingered and dwelt on each lovely view, Constance felt that her mind was receiving beautiful pictures, which would never be effaced by time or change; each would have its treasured place in memory's precious volume, and its own little history attached to it.

When they reached the highest point, and found the rest of the party already there, and luncheon prepared, they were obliged to descend from their Elysium, to the common-place affairs of this life, for Constance was greeted by Dora with the exclamation, "Oh, I am so glad you are come, for I am so very hungry."

"Yes," Captain Everington continued, "she has been so unsentimental as to be groaning over her hunger, instead of admiring the prospect."

"I hope I have not been the cause of her suffering," Constance answered, with a smile, as she took her seat on the grass beside her father; "but it was difficult to get on with such lovely views to look at."

Luncheon over, they wandered about a little; Gerard and Constance sat under the shade of an old weather-beaten tree, some little way apart from the rest; he claimed the song he had bespoken the previous night,—Ritter Toggenburg.

As she finished the last verse, which tells how the knight watched his beloved in her convent walls till death surprised him on his lonely guard, Gerard said, "I do not know why I asked for that song, it is a very mournful one, and it makes you look quite sad too."

"I suppose one ought to think it a very happy thing for the poor knight that death did come to release him," Constance answered, whilst she smiled to exonerate herself from the charge of sadness.

"Und so sass er viele Tage,
Sass viel' Jahre lang,"

Gerard repeated, in a musing tone,—“many long years, it was a great trial of love; do you believe in such constancy, Lily?”

"I am not sure that I ever dwelt much on the historical existence of Ritter Toggenburg," she answered, merrily.

But Gerard turned towards her one of those deep, earnest glances that came at times over his face, and gave to his eyes an expression as if they looked

through the outward form into the soul, and said, "But tell me seriously, my Lily, do you believe in such constancy?"

Her eyes were unconsciously cast down as she answered, in a low tone, "I believe it would be possible to endure anything for one we loved."

"Through evil report, and good report, honour and dishonour?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered eagerly, "if one's own heart told one that the evil report and dishonour were all unfounded, and one could honour and revere still."

"But let it be that they were not unfounded,—could love endure such trials, and be constant still?" he asked.

"Oh, do not imagine such a miserable case," she said, almost in a pained tone; "it is too sad even to fancy."

"But just for once imagine it, and tell me," he continued eagerly, "what you think."

She did not answer for some moments, and then said, "I cannot believe that love once given wholly and truly could be withdrawn; but its whole tone would be altered; if reverence were gone, it would almost seem as if the outer form alone remained while the spirit had flown, and yet I suppose the poor heart in its agony would cling to that outer form still. But, oh, you must not make me imagine such a dreadful case any more," she added, while she looked at him with an earnest, trustful glance.

He seized her hand, and clasped it eagerly, but at that moment the voices of the rest of the party were heard, and after another earnest pressure, he released

the hand, which made an instinctive effort to withdraw itself, and their *tête-à-tête* was at an end.

"We thought we heard music," Mr. Montrevor said, as he seated himself beside Constance; "were you singing, my child?"

"Yes, Papa, one song."

"It was too greedy of Clifford to keep it all to himself," Captain Everington ejaculated; "we must have another."

"From Dora," Constance answered.

"No, from you, you pleasant bird," Dora said, laughingly; "you know you can sing at all times and seasons, it comes to you as easily as it does to others to talk."

"Why not compromise matters, and have a duett?" Captain Everington interposed, who, it must be confessed, had an evident desire that his wife should be a performer, and not a listener.

"That will be very pleasant," Constance answered, and a duett was soon chosen,—English, at Captain Everington's entreaty. Another followed, by general desire, when the first was ended, and then another, till they had whiled away so much time that the sun had far advanced on its westward journey before they commenced the descent.

Day after day passed away much as this one had passed. Excursions were made in the neighbourhood. Hours, that fled like minutes, were spent together by Constance and Gerard, seated on some hill top, or under the walls of some ruined castle, forgetting all but the joy of the present moment, and feeling as if all things of earth wore a brighter hue than ever

before. They travelled on to Coblenz, and there awaited the arrival of the Rockwoods. Every day they explored some part of the country, or made excursions on the Moselle, visiting all the objects of interest in the neighbourhood.

One evening, after one of these expeditions, Dora was so tired that she went to her own room to lie down; Constance accompanied her, and after arranging her pillows sat down beside her. They began to talk on former days, and were so engrossed that nearly an hour passed away, and they were aroused by Captain Everington knocking at the door, and asking rather anxiously, if they did not mean to appear again that night.

"Oh, go, Lily," Dora exclaimed, "I am sure Mr. Clifford has grown very impatient, and that brought Charlie here. Do go, and I will come soon. Will you ring the bell as you pass, that I may have my hair put to rights?"

Constance did as she was requested, and returned to the sitting-room: Gerard immediately placed a chair for her on the balcony, and took up his station beside her. "I thought you and Mrs. Everington were in league together to give us a most mournful evening; I have been struggling to keep down my rising impatience to please you," he added, with a smile.

"I am so glad to hear it," was the answer, merrily given, "I hope you succeeded."

"I find gazing on this the best antidote," he replied, "while he put a small oval miniature case in her hand.

She opened it, and saw a beautiful little coloured photograph of the picture that had caused so many comments. "Oh, 'Spring Flowers' again," she said in some surprise; "was it a favourite of yours too?"

"Do you not then recognise the likeness?" he asked.

"I know who it was said to be like," she answered; "but no one knows his own face."

"I will tell you the history of that picture," he said, taking the miniature out of her hand, and restoring it to its place in his waistcoat pocket. "How little I ever thought that the day would come when I should tell it to you! You know the artist's name, Kenelm, he is a very clever young fellow, and used to be often in my rooms. One day he came to me quite out of heart, not being able to decide on a subject for a picture that pleased him. It was on my return to London, after the time I spent with you last autumn; I sketched something that enchanted him, and he entreated me to make a picture from it; I said I could not, but would give him the sketch, and worked away at the face with chalks. It was the face you see here. I little thought then that the original would ever—but I will not say what I thought," he added, checking himself with a deep sigh; "and when I went to the Exhibition this year, the first picture my eyes rested on was that; I did not stop to consider, but bought it on the spot, and before I left London had this photograph taken from it."

Constance did not answer, but a look of pleasure passed over her face, as she recalled the day she had

seen him there, when he passed her without any sign of recognition.

The explanation of the thoughts that caused the smile was requested, and this led to a conversation that lasted till the hour at which the party usually separated for the night.

One morning the post brought a packet of letters for Gerard. After opening and glancing over one large, official-looking document, he folded it up, and his eyes wandered about the room in quest of some one, the only one those eyes ever sought. She was in a small, inner room, which was used as a second sitting-room, though in reality a bed-room, finishing a sketch. Dora was seated beside her, watching the progress of the drawing. Gerard soon discovered her, and made for the room; Dora was too recently a bride not to understand at a glance the meaning of his glance, and under pretext of fetching a book, she got up and went into the next room.

The windows of the inner rooms opened upon a balcony, over which was a kind of blind or awning, that made it a pleasant and tolerably retired retreat. Gerard looked towards it, and said, "Will you come out with me for a few minutes?"

The brush was laid down instantly, and she went with him. He took out his large letter, saying, "It is from the Herald's office, Lily, the official information that I am privileged to assume the name and armorial bearings of the Aubreys. Your voice must call me first by that name, and then it will have for ever pleasant associations with it. Will you say it?"

He took her hands as she looked up at him, smiled, and said, "Mr. Aubrey."

"No, no, not Mr. Gerard Aubrey. Say it, my sweet one; Gerard and Constance Aubrey," he murmured low.

"Gerard Aubrey," she repeated.

"You will not join them together," he said, pleadingly. "Oh, Lily, words cannot tell how I long for that day which shall join them together for ever. Will you not fix it? I have waited day after day, kept back the longing request for fear of paining you, but at times it is almost more than I can do; you know not how I yearn for you to be mine, mine only."

The colour left her cheeks for a moment; she murmured, "And leave papa, dear papa, all alone by himself! Oh, let us wait, we are so happy; do not let us make him so lonely."

"But, Lily, you must leave him some time; it will not be any easier in six months than it is now."

She did not seem to see the force of this reasoning, for she bent her head down, and looked half sadly on the ground. But having once begun to let out what was passing in his heart, Gerard was not to be stopped, and he pleaded so long and earnestly, that Constance began to feel as if she were very unkind not to be persuaded, when fortunately one little sentence so soothed her feelings, that she could look up and smile; it was, "And then you can come back to him whenever you like."

Gerard brightened at that smile, and before they had left the balcony there had been a sort of murmured

assent to his proposition that the marriage should take place some time next spring. This was a great point gained, and ere long he hoped to accustom her to think of a yet earlier time, but he would not press her any more now. When they left the balcony she went up to her father, who was sitting in the window reading, and gave him a little gentle kiss on the forehead; she felt almost guilty towards him in her half consent to name a time for leaving him. He put down his book as she stood by him, and looking in her face, stroked her hair fondly. Gerard felt as he watched her then, that he must leave the subject in abeyance for many days to come.

The next evening Lord and Lady Rockwood and Frances arrived, and after staying a day to allow Frances to see something of the neighbourhood, the whole party proceeded to Mayence. The road was decided on in preference to the steamer, as they could then stop and explore wherever they chose. Lord Rockwood had brought his *barouche* with him, and carriages for the rest of the party having been engaged, they set off. Gerard had managed to secure places for himself and Constance outside one of the carriages, where he felt he could have her undisturbed. The weather was bright and cloudless, though not too hot, and most enjoyable for travelling. Constance's thoughts seemed to flow forth so naturally and easily beneath Gerard's beaming glances; it was as if the sunshine had opened all the flowers of her mind, and they delighted in basking in its delicious rays. And on they travelled, talking of all things that were in their hearts, interchanging thoughts that

were understood ere half expressed, but listened to, till every word was said, with eager ears.

“Are you happy?” Gerard asked as they drew near their resting-place for the night; not that he needed to know, he had felt her happiness at each moment of the day, but it would be so sweet to hear her own lips express it,—“Are you happy?”

“Oh, so happy,” she said, looking up at him with the bright, trustful look of childhood in her eyes, “so happy. I sometimes feel as if it could not be real, it seems too much happiness, like a dream that will pass away. But it will not pass away, will it?”

Gerard answered not at first, but seized her hand, and grasped it in his, and then murmured forth, as he heaved a deep sigh, “Heaven forbid that it should, my precious one.”

CHAPTER XII.

"Nature hath assign'd
Two sovereign remedies for human grief;
Religion, surest, firmest, first, and best,
Strength to the weak and to the wounded balm;
And strenuous action next."

SOUTHEY.

AND where was Eustace? Where was he whose early dream of happiness had been fulfilled had he but enjoyed one of those hours that now were Gerard's portion day after day? Had his sun of joy set when Constance's had gained its meridian height?

There is a sun that shall never go down. Thrice blessed are they on whom it shines!

The Rector was returning from a visit to old Stephen at the South Lodge, on that lovely summer evening which Gerard and Constance had passed on the balcony at Godesberg. As he walked slowly home through the park, musing on many things, the sound of wheels, an unusual sound at that hour when the hall was empty, arrested his attention. He was near the park palings, and looking over a little locked gate that opened into the road he caught sight of a fly, and Eustace's head was put out of the window. His father unlocked the gate, and in a moment stood beside him. It was a surprise to see him arrive, and when the Rector saw the face that had a far more worn and haggard look than he expected, he feared that in-

creasing illness had caused his son's unexpected return. He got into the carriage, and drove with Eustace to the house. The first enquiries were after Eustace's health; they were answered vaguely, as they always were; but the father's anxious glances seemed to demand something more, and to the question, asked in a tone that did not betray half as much anxiety as the countenance, "Do you really think you have gained ground, then, since you left?" he answered, "I thought I had considerably when I went into Wales, but I have not felt so sure of it the last few days; and selfishly, I fear, have come home when I am likely to be more a trouble than a pleasure; not but what a little rest will set me up, I daresay," he added, forcing a smile.

His father knew full well what those few days had made known, but made no allusion to it, indeed Constance's engagement was not referred to between them.

At the gate Aunt Mabel met them, attracted too by the sound of wheels. She greeted Eustace in her quiet way, making him feel, though little was said, how very welcome he was. He was soon seated in the dining-room at the evening repast, but he ate little, and leant back in his chair as if tired and absent. Aunt Mabel thought he wished to talk with his father, and left the room on some pretext; but though she was quite right in her surmises, Eustace was too weary and too much exhausted to-night to rouse himself for the exertion of talking. Before going up-stairs, however, he asked his father, "Shall you be in your room to-morrow morning as usual? for

if you are, and I shall not interrupt you, I shall come and sit an hour with you."

"Come when you like, my boy," was the answer, "I need not say you will be welcome."

Eustace's nights had not been very refreshing of late, and often he did not sleep till towards morning; this was the case to-night, and it was late before he awoke. He tried to arouse himself to a sense of pleasure at being at home again, but happiness was a duty now, and one which it was hard to practise.

The desire for the interview with his father was uppermost, and when breakfast was over, he went straight to the study.

The books were pushed aside as he came in, and Eustace drew a chair near the table and sat down. He had a simple, straightforward way of beginning anything he wished to say, and after the usual morning salutations, he said, "It is a long time since you talked to me about my future profession, just before I went abroad two years ago with — (he was going to say with Gerard Clifford, but he passed it over); I could give you no answer then, for my mind was not made up; it is now, I think, entirely. I feel as if I had lived a long life since those days, and many things wear a different aspect; my thoughts, too, are changed, and my wish now is to take orders as soon as may be."

His father looked up with a brightened aspect; it was the wish nearest his heart, and yet he could not desire that his son should enter such a profession, which of necessity implies an entire self-renunciation, without weighing well the cost. And he thought

that Eustace's blighted affection for Constance might have cast a gloom over earthly things, which might make him view them otherwise than he would when this cloud had passed over; but he knew not how deep that affection lay. He expressed pleasure at his son's desire, but set before him in a few earnest words the motives that should influence those who stand apart as Christ's ambassadors.

"I trust I seek the office with a single motive," Eustace answered; "I have tried in many ways to satisfy the craving after happiness, and I believe all have been permitted to fail, or to be unsatisfying, to teach me where alone it is to be found."

No news of earthly advancement for his son, of worldly fortune or honour, would have given to the father's heart the joy it now felt at hearing these words. There was one point yet upon which he must satisfy himself, and that the turning-point. And in the solemn tone of one who felt the unspeakable importance of his words, he said, "Eustace, your words have given me great comfort, but there is one thing more I would say. In God's service alone is happiness; and in thus dedicating yourself to His service, you will doubtless find a joy to which nothing in this earth may be compared, though it may be a joy hedged in with many sorrows. Yet the desire for happiness is a low motive for serving God. We may not seek Him for the loaves and fishes, but because we have heard His words, and they have pierced our inmost souls, and He Himself and His love are the all-constraining spring and attraction. Is it this that draws you? if it is, then, indeed, have I abundant cause to bless God's holy Name."

Eustace sat in silence a few moments, his brow contracted as if in deep thought; and then he answered, low, but firmly, "I trust it is; and if it is," he added, after another moment's pause, "I have your consent?"

"My consent and my blessing, my son," was the answer; the heart was too full for more, and Eustace rose and left the room.

That evening, when the sun was sinking, he made his way to the seat on the hill-side. He walked with a different step from that of days gone by; his tread had lost much of its lightness and elasticity, his mind much of its gaiety; but yet there was a feeling of settled peace at the heart now, that it knew not in those days; there was a sense of a hard day's labour accomplished, and the stillness and solemnity of eve attained.

He reached the seat ere the sun had set. It was a calm, grey evening; no bright tints nor glowing colours were to be seen on the solemn woods and distant landscape. Not a leaf was stirring, no sounds of life, but the lowing of the cattle in the valley beneath, and the faint tinkling of the sheep-bell from the opposite hill. Involuntarily, many thoughts of the past came floating over his mind; he thought of her who had so often sat there beside him, forming bright schemes for the future; she was far away now, receiving another's vows, plighting her own; he was alone; his boyhood's love, his life-long affection was unheeded, nay, unknown.

But such thoughts were not now to be indulged. He had not come here for sweet reminiscences, for dreamy recollections. The one long-cherished dream

of youth must be laid aside for ever, the awakening had come. And calmly and firmly he tore from his heart the one bright treasure; gently and tenderly he laid it down; sadly but unswervingly he bade it farewell for ever, and it was buried in that fathomless grave, the past.

It was over; he rose and left the spot, gazing once long and lingeringly around, and then turned his steps homeward. Eustace Montrevor's lot in life was chosen now.

The days passed quietly away in that peaceful rectory. Aunt Mabel's pretty sitting-room was at first Eustace's study; its brightness and her gentle cheerfulness were helpful to him. He spoke little, and thought little, at least of the past; he was learning to nerve himself for the future,—the future that was to be life in earnest for him. He hoped to be able to prepare himself for the September ordination, and after the first few days he began a systematic course of study. He was more than ever glad that his time at Oxford had not been wasted.

Aunt Mabel would sit and watch him sometimes as he stood in the recess of the window in the quiet evening, looking out on the peaceful landscape, and think how sharp and thin the outline of his features had become, and how white his hands had grown. And the little hollow cough of which he was almost unconscious, it had become so constant, would make her start, and give her a pang at the heart. At last her anxiety aroused the fears of his father, who had been resting in the calm happiness which the knowledge of his son's choice of a profession had

given him, and had banished all anxiety from his mind.

But when Aunt Mabel drew his attention to the state of Eustace's health, he became more uneasy than she was, magnified every symptom in his own mind, and could not rest till Dr. Walton had been again sent for to pronounce in what state the lungs were. He came, and it required all the Rector's self-command to sit quietly by whilst the examination was taking place; he followed each movement of the stethoscope, and watched every expression of the doctor's face. At length it was over, and Eustace stood up, and looked to Dr. Walton for his opinion. The kind old man, feeling for the father's anxiety, was determined to make the best of the case: "An improvement, certainly, since last winter," he began; "not so great, perhaps, as we could have wished, but still an improvement, which gives great hopes for the future. The lungs still require rest and great care. Fortunate for you, Sir," he added, turning to Eustace, "that you have not adopted your father's profession,—it would be inconvenient now."

Eustace's countenance fell, and his father unconsciously heaved a deep sigh. Dr. Walton saw that he had given pain, and hastened to assure them that there was nothing absolutely to be alarmed about; rest and care for a year or two might do wonders. Luncheon was soon announced. Eustace did not stay many minutes in the dining-room, but returned to his father's study, and there, seated by the table, with his arms upon it, his head resting on his hands, he was soon buried in thought. He sat thus for some

minutes till hearing the voices pass from the dining-room to the drawing-room, he rang the bell, and desired the servant to let Dr. Walton know that he should be glad to speak to him alone before he left.

In a few moments he was in the study, and seated beside Eustace, looking at him with kindness and interest.

"I should feel obliged to you, Dr. Walton," Eustace began, "if you will tell me exactly what state I am in. Am I likely really to recover, I mean, to be strong again, or is it a question of prolonging life for a few years, if extraordinary precautions are taken?" The eyes were raised as he finished speaking, and fixed calmly, but earnestly, on the doctor's face.

Dr. Walton could not have spoken aught but the plain truth while that quiet gaze was upon him; and after clearing his throat, and looking down for a moment, he said, "At your age, and taken in time as the disease has happily been, I think we may fairly hope that in a few years you will be restored to health; I do not pretend to say that I expect you will ever be very strong, but yet I think that you will have health sufficient to go through life without inconvenience. Of course, to attain to that state, you must be most careful to avoid everything that has any tendency to increase the disorder; exposure to cold or damp, much use of the delicate organ, might be attended with very serious consequences."

"Then you think it would be useless for me to attempt to take orders this year, which I had greatly desired to do?"

"The height of imprudence, Sir, the height of im-

prudence; I could not answer for the consequence if you were to enter now upon the duties of a clergyman."

Eustace thought for a few moments, and then asked, "Would there be the same risk in another climate, if I were in a mild temperature always?"

"That would, of course, greatly alter the case; many people can sing in Italy in winter, who in England would lose their voices at the first touch of cold weather. A warm climate would doubtless, too, tend greatly to hasten the cure. You could not do better than set off for Madeira before the commencement of winter. The sea voyage in itself might be very beneficial."

"There are other places that would do as well as Madeira, I suppose?"

"Yes, certainly; I do not know that I have any particular partiality for Madeira, but a sea voyage I should strongly recommend."

"Thank you, Dr. Walton; I will think of what you have said, and now that the railway is open, perhaps I can get over and pay you a visit when I have decided."

"Let me have a line beforehand to name the day, that I may be sure to be at home; and now good morning. Take great care of yourself, and avoid the night air."

Eustace accompanied Dr. Walton to the door, and then returned to the study, and resuming his former posture seemed lost in thought. His father soon came into the room, and though they spoke, neither alluded to what was in the minds of both. The

Rector tried to be thankful for the hopes held out of ultimate recovery, and to banish the disappointment from his thoughts.

When the evening came, Eustace took his hat and set out for a walk. He hesitated as his feet took the familiar path. Had not the seat on the hill-side too many associations, was it well to seek it still? But no, it had been the scene of the commencement of the sacrifice, it should be of its consummation.

The day had been unusually warm, the ground was dry and parched. Eustace threw himself down, as of old, on the turf, and looked upwards. The sun was setting brilliantly; the little clouds edged with gold, which Constance used to remind him that he loved to watch, were floating about in the glowing sky, and he lay and watched them now. But there were no longer the bright, fairy visions which in boyhood's day he saw in the azure expanse; the clouds were distant islands now, their heaven the mighty deep, and he was a wanderer on the heaving billows. All the thoughts that had been in his mind passed in review before him.

He had resolved to devote himself in this calling to God's service; he had wished to forget the past, and set himself to work in earnest; but to give up country, home, and friends had not come before him as part of the sacrifice. And yet that was now the only way in which he could fulfil his resolution. In some warm, sunny clime, on the other side the globe, he might yet labour with full strength. If he remained in England he must be idle for at least two or three years, and then it was doubtful whether he could

ever work as would be needed in one who undertook the charge of souls. Such was the subject of his meditation. He had no doubt in his heart which course he should take, only painful thoughts would ever arise, and seem to make it a hard matter to follow it gladly. But Eustace had not striven so long for the mastery of his own heart in vain, and trials that would have been bitter erewhile were now calmly encountered.

He thought he had quite resolved to tell his father of his wishes to-night; but as he came back from his walk, and noticed the smile that welcomed his approach, his resolution wavered. But he would not be overcome by that sophistry of the heart which ever puts off an unpleasant task with the thought, the present is not the time, it will be easier to-morrow. And not trusting himself to delay any longer, he entered at once upon the subject. He told first what Dr. Walton had said of the benefit of change of climate, then of his earnest wish not to give up the work to which he had destined himself, and gradually he prepared his father's heart for the proposal.

It fell on his ear, at the first moment, like some mournful tidings too sad to realize, and he could have murmured forth the prayer, "Take this cup from me," but he checked it ere formed. He could hardly answer his son, but the words came forth at last, choked and hurried, "God forbid, my boy, that I should be any hindrance in your path; but I had not thought of this, it has come suddenly upon me. Let me have to-night to think over it."

It was a bitter struggle which the father had with his own heart that night, ere he could give up, unmurmuringly, the son to whom he had unconsciously looked as the comfort of his old age. He seemed to read depths in his own spirit that were unknown before, and he was horror-struck at his own want of resignation. He recalled the lonely watches in the little inn at Rutusdorf, when he had felt that he was content that God's will should be done; and now his son was restored to him again, and only wished to leave him that he might devote himself to God's service, and yet his heart seemed to rise wildly in opposition. But it is easier to submit to grief when it comes direct from God's hand, when, awe-struck, we can only bow the head and say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good," than to be willing with our own hand to strike the blow that shall make us desolate.

The struggle could not last in a heart disciplined as his had been; stricken and wounded it might be, but with the sword still piercing it, it would be laid at the Master's feet. And so it was.

When morning came, the father, in words that cannot be repeated, for the tone and look with which they were accompanied gave them their intense expression, told his son that he was willing, and he hoped thankful, to return to the Lord the treasure He had lent.

Aunt Mabel heard it all with outward calmness, but with a trembling heart, which needed the solitude that is least solitude, ere it could offer up the thanksgiving which seemed the only fit outlet for its emotion.

There was another to be told, another who was never forgotten in that home, who was as a child to the Rector and Aunt Mabel; both had it in their hearts to write to her; but one morning at breakfast Eustace said, "I am thinking of writing to Constance to-day; shall you have anything to say, Aunt Mabel?" He spoke quite calmly, but it was the first time her name had passed his lips since he had been in the house.

Her last letter to him, written after she had received his from North Wales, just before they left London, had been unanswered. Now he felt there was no risk to him in writing, all their former life seemed completely a thing of the past, a life apart and by itself, and with which the present had no connexion. In her letter she begged him to try and persuade Ada to come to Elvanlees on their return from the continent; so to give Ada's answer was an ostensible reason for writing, and his own plans could be mentioned. He wrote simply and naturally; he had never felt that he was doing any great thing, and he had not thought that to others there would appear any unusual self-devotion in his course of life. But "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and his letter, in its entire self-forgetfulness, betrayed such a nobleness of heart, such a devotion of the whole life, that it was received with an emotion he little expected. For whilst writing he had almost feared to weary Constance with his own plans, when her heart must be engrossed with other things.

The letter was received at Heidelberg one bright, lovely morning about an hour before the travellers

set out on a day's excursion. Constance read half of it in the sitting-room, but then her eyes grew dizzy, and feeling a wish to be alone, she folded it up, and left the room, in spite of the eyes that had watched her with an almost impatient eagerness. Going into her own room, she sat down in stillness to read it again and understand it.

What strange thoughts its holy tone awoke in her! What recollections of the past, of her own yearnings after perfection, of the talks with Eustace when they would strive to picture to themselves what would be the noblest life to lead, and then of his sadness and his struggles, and now he had triumphed over all; he was free; this was *Excelsior* in truth.

The burning tears flowed down her cheeks, and her heart beat as it all passed through her mind. And she, where was she? Where were all those longings, those aspirations after something higher, nobler than this world could give? Were they not all now bound round one earthly being? was not he the very aim and end of her existence, and she could not unbind them, she could not even in thought for one moment wish them fixed elsewhere.

She sat still, Eustace's open letter in her hand, each word read and pondered over, and the blinding tears still filled her eyes, when her father's voice was heard at the door, "The carriages are ready, Constance, can I come in?"

He came in, she turned away her head to conceal her face, made an effort to look cheerful, and followed him to the carriage.

Gerard had some time since found that the seat

behind Lord Rockwood's barouche was the most agreeable one for himself and Constance, and had requested the use of it. Lord Rockwood smiled, and assured him it should be at his service for the whole journey, if the man and the maid could be accommodated elsewhere; so on all their little excursions it was given up to Gerard as a matter of course. His quick glance had noticed the look of trouble on Constance's face ere she had left the room, and he had been waiting restlessly for her return. Now they were alone, and his first question was, what had troubled her. There was a tenderness in his tone that seemed quite to change his voice whenever he was alone with her, and did not restrain his love from appearing.

"I do not know that it ought to trouble me," she said, in answer to his gentle words, "but I have had a letter from Eustace this morning,—such a beautiful letter, and he is going to take orders, and go abroad—for ever, I think he feels it is," and her tears could hardly be restrained from falling again as she spoke.

"And it will seem to you as if you were losing a brother when you part with him," Gerard answered tenderly.

"Yes, it will be quite that. But it is not that which I am thinking about. But, oh, he is so good, and I used to think once I would be so good too," and she gave a deep sigh.

"But you are good, my darling, excellent," Gerard answered, eagerly.

"Oh no, I am not; I might have been, perhaps, once; ut oh! I am so far from it now. You must read his

letter, and then you will understand what I feel,—it is such a noble life.”

“And yours will be a noble life, too?”

“If it is, you must train it to be so,” she answered meekly: “I have so much to learn.”

Gerard started at her words, but he recovered himself instantly, and said, “And is it not a noble life, Lily, to live to make another happy?”

“It is so delightful, so joyful to do so; it seems too easy to be noble,” she answered; her eyes sank, and for some moments she seemed lost in thought.

A little bird passed over their heads, and then suddenly changed its course and flew upwards. The noise of his wings roused Constance; she followed his flight with her eyes, and then looking down again, said, “If that is all that is needed to lead a noble life, it will be as easy to fly to heaven as it is to that little bird to mount. It will not be a strait and narrow road.” The last words were murmured so low that Gerard could not hear them.

When evening came, and they sat in the ruins of the castle, Constance almost trembled at feeling how intense her happiness was.

She wrote the next day to Eustace: she knew him too well to offer praise to him; but it was a relief to express her thoughts, and her letter was a paraphrase of the words she had spoken to Gerard the day before. She reminded him of their childish talks, and said half sadly, that he had left her now far behind. She could only look on wonderingly and humbly to see him soar so high, (the bird of yesterday was in her mind,) and feel frightened to think how little she

seemed to care to mount. There were some little words that told of her exceeding happiness, though it was only alluded to;—to her, it was too real, too much a part of her very life, to need any affirmation.

This letter made the blood rush to Eustace's pale cheek, as he found it on his plate when he came down to breakfast. He did not read it then, but put it aside, and went with it alone into the garden. When he had read it, he felt more strongly than ever, how well it was for him that the seas should part him from her, and from the scenes of so many happy hours.

There were few events at Elvanlees to mark the days as they passed, though each, as taking one from the short space that father and son were to be together, had its own special memory stamped upon it ere it was parted with.

Yet one event there was which, at the time, made such a sensation in the whole parish, that it must not be omitted, though it concerned principally poor Mrs. Lester, who seems to have been almost forgotten.

It will be remembered that she had an only brother, who had married an Italian lady of noble birth, the daughter of a refugee. They had one child, who almost ever since her birth had lived with her mother in Italy. On her mother's death, which had occurred about a year before, her father had sent for her to live with him in London, where he always resided. But Mrs. Lester had since heard from him that he proposed emigrating to America; he said that it was

uncertain whether his daughter would accompany him. Mrs. Lester could not but feel that it would not be desirable for her to do so, as his home was not likely to be one suited for his child. She had never heard what decision he had arrived at, as a few hasty lines written on the eve of his embarkation, in which his daughter was not mentioned, were the only communication she had received from him, and she had never been able to gain any tidings of him since.

One Sunday morning, the congregation assembled for the early service at Elvanlees were startled by the sudden fainting of a young lady, who was a perfect stranger. Mrs. Lester, who happened to be near her, moved directly to her assistance, and she was carried into the open air. A book fell from her hand, and what was Mrs. Lester's astonishment at discovering, by the name written in it, that this poor girl was her unknown niece! She had her conveyed immediately to her own house, and as consciousness did not return, the doctor was sent for; but before he arrived, she had ruptured a blood-vessel, and great fears were entertained for her life.

For many days, as she hovered between life and death, the strange, foreign young lady, as she was called, was the talk of the parish. But the immediate danger passed, and as she lay ill and weak in her aunt's house, seen by no one, she was forgotten. In that house was no forgetting, for her presence seemed to have cast a gloom upon it. When she partially recovered from her illness, she sank into such depression of spirits, that poor Mrs. Lester thought her mind would become affected. She would sit for

hours in the same position, not weeping, but moaning with a bitterness that made her good aunt's heart ache.

She would give no account of herself, but only entreated, with an earnestness that would not be gainsayed, that none might know that she was there, and that she might be called by Mrs. Lester's name. As she seemed to shrink with fear from all mention of her father, Mrs. Lester imagined, though she was deeply pained at such a thought, that it was to prevent his tracing her that she made these requests. She knew his reckless self-indulgence of old, and feared it might have made him harsh and unfeeling to his child. At any rate, she was too ill now to be argued with, and Mrs. Lester consoled herself with the thought, that her own duty was to take care of her. What most distressed her, was her absolute refusal to receive visits from the Rector, or Aunt Mabel;—refusals accompanied with such imploring entreaties to be left in peace for the little time she should be on earth, that it would have required a different mind from Mrs. Lester's to have opposed her.

This event had for a time divided the village interest with the news of "Mr. Eustace's going away," but it was forgotten now, and all hearts were full of the thoughts of losing him, and of Miss Montrevor's engagement to Mr. Aubrey.

The time of their return was looked for anxiously at the Rectory. Percy hoped to get a few days' leave to come home,—“Though,” he remarked in a letter to Aunt Mabel, “there will be no getting a word out of

Constance now. And I feel as if I could quarrel with 'the learned friend' on the smallest amount of provocation. Why she could not be contented at home, where everybody was so fond of her, I cannot understand: I never contemplated the probability of her leaving us. Poor Elvanlees will hang its dejected head when its Lily is transplanted."

CHAPTER XIII.

"'Twas written in her very air
That love had pass'd, and enter'd there."

N. P. WILLIS.

THE bells were ringing gaily at Elvanlees one July evening, the cottagers were standing at their doors, old Stephen was sitting in his garden, and all had their eyes turned in one direction.

Stephen's grand-daughter, who lived with him, was talking to him:—"And don't you remember the gentleman, grandfather? He was here, now it might be a year or two ago,—I can't mind which,—and rode out with Mr. Montrevor and our young lady, and was a tall, fine-looking gentleman."

"I don't remember nothing about it, child," the old man answered, in rather a peevish tone: "I remember her walking with Master Eustace a sight of times, and always coupled them together in my mind; and now to think of her going to marry a strange gentleman, as we know nothing about, and poor Master Eustace to be going to foreign parts. Ah well! I suppose folks knows their own business best. I should have thought a finer gentleman than Master Eustace no lady in the land need want."

"Hush! grandfather, I hear wheels,"—and the girl flew to the gate, and before the carriage was in sight had it wide open, and her eyes wider still, to catch a sight of "our young lady and the strange gentleman."

The carriage drove through the heavy iron gates, and Constance looked and smiled at the girl and at old Stephen, as it passed quickly through and rolled down the road to the Hall.

On the door-steps stood the Rector, Aunt Mabel, and Eustace ; and, bounding before them in an ecstasy of joy, little Woolly. There were warm greetings, joyful words of welcoming and of gladness at the return, and the meeting was over, which, in spite of himself, Eustace had so much dreaded ; and he had seen Constance and her betrothed ; had marked how his eye followed her, as each one spoke to her ; how proudly he seemed to look upon her, the loved of all, as his own beloved and loving above all ; and yet he was still and calm.

"And you gave the bells leave to ring, Uncle ?" Constance asked merrily : "that is almost contrary to regulation."

"It was impossible to refuse old William's request, when he pleaded that it would help to bring a blessing on our lady and the gentleman, if the church-bells welcomed them home."

Aunt Mabel sat at a distance watching them all, much as in a dream,—Constance's bright looks, and Eustace's pale cheeks and firmly-pressed lips ; Mr. Montrevor's look of mingled pleasure and sadness, and Gerard's proud joy ;—truly, she thought, "the heart knoweth its own gladness and bitterness."

Constance went up before long to her own room, and her aunt went with her, and there they had the talk which Aunt Mabel had longed for ever since she heard of Constance's engagement. And she rejoiced

that one at least of her children had a cup brimful of joy. She was almost forgetting that Constance knew nothing of Eustace's love for her, and was on the point of saying how beautifully he had borne the sorrow, but the words were stopped in time.

After dinner, the whole party went out on the terrace; the bells were still ringing out their merry peal. Constance determined, in spite of Gerard's longing looks, to have an hour's quiet talk with Eustace; it would be almost his last chance, for to-morrow he had arranged to go to a friend's house and read with him, in preparation for his ordination. He had resolved to stay and see Constance and Gerard once together, that he might feel sure he had conquered.

Their walk and talk were very interesting, very grave, almost solemn,—it could not be otherwise; but full of deep interest to both. Constance sat down, when their *tête-à-tête* was over, and Gerard was instantly beside her. The bells, which had been silent for a few minutes, struck up once more. "How pretty the bells sound at night!" Constance remarked to Gerard: "do you like hearing them?"

The answer came so low that she alone heard it:—"Yes; I have been thinking of another day when they will ring, Lily, and believing that it soon will come. Oh that it were to-morrow!"

The sound of the same merry bells came in at the window of Mrs. Lester's little drawing-room, where lay, pale and weak, her young niece. At the first moment it seemed pleasant to her, but ere long it was

wearying, and she asked, "Why will those bells go on for ever with their mournful wail?"

"Nay, my child, it's not that," answered Mrs. Lester: "but let me close the windows if it wearies you. You know why they ring?"

"No," she answered; and seemed to care little to hear, and murmured low, "To me they have the saddest tone."

But Mrs. Lester would have believed no one could be indifferent to what concerned Constance, and she began at once to tell,—“Did you not know, my dear, that Mr. Montrevor and his daughter are come home to-day—my dear pupil? They have been abroad; and she is engaged to a gentleman of large fortune,—Mr. Aubrey; and to-day they are returned home, and he is come with them.”

“Engaged to be married, did you say?” Clara asked, with more interest than was her wont.

“Yes, and I do trust to one worthy of her. Oh, she was always a sweet child!”

“And is she very happy?”

“No doubt she is; but I have not seen her yet. She will come to see me before long, I daresay.”

“But remember, Aunt, I cannot see anyone,” Clara answered nervously.

“There will be no need, dear. You see no one from that window, and are seen by no one, and she can go into the dining-room; though I fully believe, if you could once make up your mind to see her, it would be a great comfort to you.”

“No; I can see no one, and no one must know I am here. You always call me by your name?” she asked anxiously.

"Yes, dear, always; and when any of the poor people, who know you are here, ask after you, it is always as Miss Lester. But now you look-so tired, you had better go to bed."

Clara agreed, because it seemed less trouble than to refuse, but her sleepless nights made bed little welcome to her.

Constance was up early the next morning, and out on the terrace before breakfast, with little Woolly gambolling before her, as in former days; and save that there were traces of deeper feeling on her face, she looked much the same as when first we saw her there, three years ago. She had walked out through the oriel window of the morning-room, and after taking two or three turns on the terrace, she sat down on the step without the window, little Woolly crouched at her feet. She had not been long seated there, before she heard a knock at the door, and in answer to her permission to enter, Eustace came into the room. She rose to meet him as he came towards her, and then seating herself again on the step, he stood beside her, leaning against the window.

"It is my last day, Lily," he said, trying to smile; "and I am come, as we used to come when we were going to school, to ask if I may have one last walk with you. We shall have time to go to the old seat before breakfast, I think."

She rose instantly, and prepared to accompany him. They said but little during the walk: his words about his schoolboy days had awakened so many thoughts in her mind, that it was not till the seat was reached that she could collect herself to speak, and then her heart was very full as she said, "I do not think I can realize

your plans yet, Eustace, though I have so often thought of them since I had your letter. I know I ought to be glad you should go, since it is in such a cause, but I cannot feel so. And, oh, Eustace, when the future seems all so bright to me, I cannot bear to think of you alone in a far-off land,—it seems so sad ;” and her voice trembled as she spoke.

“It does not seem so sad to me, Lily,” he answered : “it has been sad, very sad,—but that is past now, and I think I feel like one who, after long buffeting on a stormy sea, without helm or compass, all uncertain of his course, has at last arrived within sight of land.”

“And the land is the giving up all, going alone and in weakness far away from all you love, to a world of strangers. Oh, Eustace, do you remember all our talks here as children, when we used to settle what great things you were to do when you grew up ? I never thought what the reality would be : and yet this is the greatest work of all,—better than all the fame and renown you were to have gained, all the great things you were to have done.”

“Yes, Lily, I have cast about in all waters, in the search for happiness ; and believe from the depths of my soul, that nothing can satisfy the immortal spirit but living for the glory of God. We may forget the end of our existence by amusing ourselves like children, in the pursuit of pleasure, knowledge, or fame ; but the awakening must come, here or hereafter, when we shall find how miserable, unprofitable, and vain it was to seek after and rest in such things. Knowledge, which seems so far above all other pur-

there is only really good when it is shared with the chance of being in a bad way."

A sudden glow over Constance's face at his words; it seemed to her as if she had just been awakened, and she had been seeking happiness since. And the contrast between the view of life and her own struck her forcibly.

"I cannot feel frightened," she said, "when I think of my own happiness. Eustace; and you are going to give it up."

"No, Lily. If God gives you happiness you need not fear to accept it, accept it with thankfulness. I suppose we must always be try to find our happiness as a loan that may be reclaimed at any time, and so we must be prepared to give it up, and not cling to it too eagerly." He hardly liked saying this, when he felt how full of joy her heart was; but the answer showed that such a caution was not unneeded.

Constance started at his words, and almost shuddered as she said, "Give it up! Oh, Eustace, don't speak of that. Give it up! I could not do it; you do not know what you say."

Ah, Constance, did he not know! but he said, soothingly, "I did not mean to say that I had any thought that you would ever have to give it up,—only it is safer to hold our happiness thus. Life is very short, whether it be joyful or sad."

"You speak," she said, "as if you were an old man, Eustace, and yet life is only just beginning for you."

"Sometimes, I think, I feel old, and as if I had passed through a long life; but I never felt more

eager for work than now, and that is like a young, not an old man," he answered.

"And none will be near you to know how your work prospers, and to cheer you if it fail. But I am very wrong," she added, checking herself, "to be talking in this way, when I ought to have cheered you. Only I had never thought you would have left us." Her words were a sore trial to him, but he kept himself calm. It was time to return, and as they approached the house, he said, "I shall not perhaps see you alone again, Lily, so you must let me bid you farewell now. May every joy and blessing be with you;—it will ever be my greatest earthly comfort to hear of your happiness."

"But, Eustace, you will be at home again soon; why do you take leave as if we should not meet again?"

He answered as cheerfully as he could, "I do not think you will be long here; I could see yesterday evening that some one was very impatient. If I do not see Gerard to have any talk with him, you must tell him how earnestly I wish him every happiness. I should like to have said so to him myself, but I may not have the opportunity."

The terrace was reached, and ere they entered through the open window, Eustace said, "Shake hands with me, Lily, and say 'good-bye,' and we will not say it again."

He held her little hand long and tremblingly, and then murmured, "We shall meet some time. Life will soon be over."

She left him, and went up to her own room before

breakfast. Woolly ran after her, and seemed to wonder why she sat at the open window, leaning her head on her hand, and paying no heed to all his efforts to engage her attention.

Eustace went soon after breakfast. He did not in words take leave of Constance again, but only shook her hand as she assembled with the rest of the party before the door to see him off. It was more a pressure than a shake, and it seemed hard to relax the grasp. The gig, with his father in it, was at the door, and he drove off. He turned once round before they had gone many hundred yards; Gerard was bending over Constance, who had seated herself on the steps. He did not look again. The past was to be the past now, the present alone was his: and if it stood out cold and hard, without its background of associations, what matter? each hour had its work, in the fulfilment of which would be found rest and peace.

The days flew all too fast away for Gerard and Constance; not that they looked forward to any termination to their joy, for each night only gave the anticipation of a bright to-morrow. But still, when time is very full of happiness, there is a longing to linger in its borders, to lengthen out each little space.

They sat together in the pleasant morning-room, they rode together in the afternoon, they wandered together in the long, calm summer evenings. Gerard liked to visit all Constance's childhood's haunts, that he might live all her life over again with her. He was ten years older than she was—the ten years that

make such a difference in a man's or woman's life, those between twenty and thirty. He would tell her sometimes, when she was talking to him of her happy childish days, that he was quite old, and had forgotten that he had ever been a child; and she would say, with her sweet, earnest smile, "That it was much better for her, because then he could teach her to be so good."

His life had been very different from hers, for he had travelled far and wide, had mixed in society of various kinds, literary and artistic, and at times in the *gay salons* of Paris, Vienna, or Rome. And he would sit and watch her sweet, innocent face as she sang or played to him, till his eyes grew dim, and then she would rise gently from her seat, and come softly to him, and tell him music was not good for him to-day, she knew it by his face, and he must take a little turn with her on the terrace. And sometimes she would say, half whisperingly, "You are happy, Gerard, quite happy?" And he would answer, "Happy! yes, my precious one,—too happy, I believe, to realize the truth of my happiness, and sometimes, I can hardly believe in its existence."

And she would talk softly and gaily, till she had made his face as bright as her own, and then she was happy too.

He had not visited his property once since the week he had spent there after his uncle's death. He ought to have gone, he knew, but he could not tear himself away from Constance, and he had lingered on still. Letters on business reached him nearly every morning, but they were thrown aside when glanced

over. "to be answered to-morrow," or to be attended to when he went to his estate.

He had never been accustomed to follow aught but his own inclination, and he did not consider how much depended upon him now. Mr. Montrevor felt convinced that there must be much need for him to look after his affairs, when for so many years there had been so much neglect, in consequence of old Mr. Aubrey's infirm and almost childish state. But he did not like to say anything that should seem to imply that his guest ought to depart.

One morning Gerard had a more than usually urgent letter from his uncle's agent, saying that his presence was absolutely necessary. He threw it on the breakfast-table, muttering, "What a bore the man is!"

"What is it?" Mr. Montrevor asked.

"These are the sort of letters he is for ever sending me," Gerard said, putting the letter across to Mr. Montrevor: "read it, and I think you will agree with me."

Mr. Montrevor read, and then smiling, said, "Whether he is a bore or no, Gerard, it is a summons you must attend to, I think, unless you wish your affairs to become inextricably confused."

Gerard's countenance fell,—“Do you mean that I must go?” he asked, as if the idea of such a calamity had never entered his mind before.

“I really do not see how you can avoid it,” was the answer; “but you need not be away many days.”

It took Gerard all breakfast-time to persuade himself that it was possible to leave Constance for a few

days. And his resolution would hardly have been formed, had not Mr. Montrevor looked upon his departure as so entirely settled, that he began to ask him by which train he would travel. Gerard, however, persuaded himself that to-morrow would be time enough; and all that day his eyes were fixed upon Constance, as if he were laying up her every expression in his heart, to brood over till he looked on her again.

He did go at last, and drove away, hoping that he should be too late for the train; but no such good fortune awaited him, and certainly the morning-room did seem to Constance as if the sun had forgotten to shine in at the windows that day.

But she had not much time allowed her to sit and mourn over his departure, for soon her uncle paid her a visit. He had just come from Mrs. Lester's, having been summoned there by the increasing illness of her niece, but the poor girl absolutely refused to see him. It had struck him that perhaps she might not be so averse to see Constance, as she was about her own age; and the desirableness of breaking through this morbid shrinking from intercourse with others was very apparent.

When he had told Constance of his wish, she immediately promised to go. She felt a pang at her heart when she thought how unmindful she had been of this poor girl's sufferings in her own joy, though from both Aunt Mabel and Mrs. Lester she had heard of her arrival. She resolved to take some flowers to her, thinking that the sight of them might perhaps open the heart of the poor sufferer towards the donor.

Mrs. Lester met her at the door, and though a change had come over her happy little home, there was no change in the joy with which Constance was always welcomed to it. After seating her in the most comfortable chair the dining-room afforded, and placing a stool for her feet, Mrs. Lester made enquiries after her health, and that of her father, and Mr. Aubrey; and then leaving her, went with the flowers to the drawing-room.

Clara was lying very still, her eyes closed, but not asleep; when her aunt entered, she opened her eyes at the sound of the door, and they rested on the flowers. A smile came over her wan face, "Oh, that lovely clematis!" she exclaimed, "let me smell it;—delicious!" She clasped the flower quite tenderly, and murmured, "It grew over the verandah in our house at Naples. Who brought it?"

"Miss Montrevor, my dear; and she wishes particularly to know how you feel this morning, and whether you would allow her the pleasure of seeing you sometimes."

Clara did not answer at first, but gazed again at the flowers, and then said, slowly, as if the consent were given with a great effort, "I will see her now."

Mrs. Lester did not wait to allow time for this permission to be retracted, but hurrying out of the room, went at once to Constance, and requested her to follow her to the drawing-room. When Constance entered, and saw the young face that looked so pale and worn, and marked the expression of deep suffering, all her sympathies were awakened, and poor Clara's heart was touched by her tender, gentle glance.

They did not talk much together: it was difficult, when they were such entire strangers, and when Constance felt how meaningless commonplace observations would be to one whose whole aspect told of deep feelings and bitter sufferings. She did not stay long, but when she asked Clara's permission to come again soon, it was readily given.

Constance walked home thinking of the poor sufferer. There was something very interesting about her. She had a most expressive face, with large dark eyes. In manner and appearance she was more like an Italian than an English girl. And though she spoke English quite fluently, it was with a slightly foreign accent, and as if Italian were the language of her thoughts.

CHAPTER XIV.

"She had given
Life's hope to a most fragile bark—to love :
'Twas wrecked—wrecked by love's treachery."
L. E. L.

GERARD'S absence, though most trying to himself, was not ended so soon as he had hoped, and ten days had elapsed since his departure without seeing his return. His only consolation was in dwelling on the time when the house which now seemed so desolate would be his Lily's home, and all his spare moments were spent in making plans and giving directions for improvements that should make it more fitted for her.

Constance had visited Clara daily during Gerard's absence, finding that the poor sufferer had learnt to look forward with pleasure to her coming, and each day she felt more interest in the young being, the joy and health of whose existence seemed so strangely blighted, and whose life formed such a striking contrast to her own.

One afternoon, after a ride with her father, she quickly changed her dress, and set off for Mrs. Lester's cottage. Clara was lying, as usual, on her little couch, which exactly fitted into the window, and leaning her head on her hand, with her arm resting on the window-sill, as Constance opened the garden-gate, and walked along the gravel-walk to the house.

There was the same restless, longing look on her face, the same mournful, wearied expression in her eyes, as she raised them at the sound of Constance's step.

Mrs. Lester met Constance at the porch, and drew her into the opposite room before she spoke. She, too, looked sad and wearied.

"How are you to-day, Mrs. Lester?" Constance asked: "Very tired, I am afraid? Did you sit up again last night?"

"No, my dear, I did not actually sit up, though I could not help getting up two or three times in the night, and going to Clara's door to listen. Poor child, it's sad to hear the way in which she moans and talks to herself. She has something on her mind, I am sure; and yet she will never tell me anything: and as to seeing the Rector, why, my dear, you would think I had proposed something terrible to her, by the manner in which she entreats me not to mention it, and says it is cruel to ask her. He calls so often, and when I go in and tell her, it throws her into such a state of agitation, that I really dread the consequence of her being so excited, and am obliged to say no more. I am so thankful she sees you,—it is a comfort to her; and it is so kind of you to come."

"Oh, Mrs. Lester, don't say that. I am so thankful to be of use to her; but it makes me so sad when I sit beside her, and think how different our lots are. You know, of old, it was always a subject that used to puzzle me, why some were so happy and some so miserable. Everything seems to prosper with me; I seem to have every desire gratified, and to be filled with blessings. Poor old Stephen made me quite un-

comfortable the other day, when he was speaking of his daughter's life of trial, and her patience. He ended with, 'But the other world will set that right; the scale has weighed down here, it will go up there. We ought not to wish to have our good things here.'"

"Don't trouble yourself, my child;—if you needed sorrow, it would come. Hearing of your bright prospects was the only thing that has roused poor Clara. She was quite eager when I told her, and so glad to hear of your happiness; though her old, anxious look came back when she asked, 'Is he good and worthy of her?'"

"And you told her that he was, far beyond all my desert, did you not, Mrs. Lester?" Constance asked, while her eyes were instinctively cast down, and the colour rose to her cheeks, and her hands were pressed together, as if she clasped something very precious.

Mrs. Lester looked at her and smiled, with almost a mother's pride, while she answered, "I won't say I said quite that, though I said a good deal. But I will not keep you longer; I know she is listening for your step. If she should begin to open her heart to you, will you lead her on? It would be such a relief to her, I know, could she once speak of what is pressing her to the earth."

"And whilst I am here, Mrs. Lester, had you not better go and take a walk? I know Aunt Mabel wants to see you, and it is such a lovely evening for a walk; and you need be in no hurry, for Papa is from home this evening, so I shall not be expected back."

"Thank you for thinking of it. I really will go

out, for I am sure it will do me good to sit a little with your dear aunt; and I will come back in good time."

Mrs. Lester went up-stairs to get ready, and Constance walked to the door of Clara's room and knocked gently. Clara was in the same position, and gazing earnestly at the sky, which was this evening cloudless and brilliantly blue. She turned her head when Constance came in, and tried to smile as she said, "You, again? how kind! I heard your step in the garden."

"You are in your favourite place," Constance said, as she sat down beside her.

"Yes; I like it better than any other in the room: but all places are wearisome to me now. But oh, I am so glad this house stands high, and I can look out far away; it seems to help me to be calm. I don't know what I should do otherwise. If there were trees close up to the window, and I had not this distant view to fix my weary eyes upon, it would suffocate me, I think;—my mind, I mean."

This was more than she had ever said of her own state; and Constance, remembering Mrs. Lester's words, longed to encourage the pent-up stream to flow on; but whilst she hesitated what to say, Clara began again,—“Is not the sky beautiful to-night? But it does not soothe me, as the wild and stormy skies do. As you were coming in, I was thinking how like to our lives are the skies of this evening and yesterday. This sky is like yours, all bright and cloudless; mine was like this once, and then suddenly clouds gathered, the horizon grew fainter, and before I could well consider, the great black clouds gathered and

rolled over my head, and night came, dark, bewildering night, and I was lost;" and she pressed her hand to her forehead, and passed it backwards and forwards, as if she were trying to steady her thoughts.

Constance looked at her uneasily; she felt rather frightened, for she thought her mind was wandering; but suddenly Clara clasped her two hands together, and turning her face full upon Constance, said, "Shall I tell you all my life, my wretched life? I think it will ease me to tell you. You will not mind, will you? it will not distress you?"

"Oh no; do tell me: I shall be so glad, if it will comfort you."

Clara covered her face with her hands before she began, and seemed to be going through some great inward struggle; when she withdrew them, and her eyes met Constance's, she said, hurriedly, "Don't look at me when I speak, please do not: look away; look out of the window, and I will begin. I must begin at once, or I shall never have courage another time."

Constance turned away as she wished, and after two or three efforts, with her eyes closed and her hand over them, Clara began:—"I only want to tell you of the last year of my life, that has been life to me; all the rest was not life,—it was a bright summer's day, and I was a child at play. You know how I lived with my mother in our beautiful Italian home. There were no dark stormy skies there, and everything seemed so bright and laughing. But there came a day when she looked careworn and sad, and I grew sad as the light in her eyes faded, and she

drooped and drooped,"—here Clara stopped, and after some moments' pause went on,—“and I was alone, alone. Oh, how all life was altered then! the sun was gone down, and I thought it would never rise again; but it did rise, ah! how brilliantly, how gloriously!” and she clasped her hands, and almost smiled, and then trembled: “but it was eclipsed; dark, cold night came again, and the black clouds chased each other, and the wind roared, and the tempest rose, and the poor heart quivered and shook, and the brain whirled round and round, and then it all seemed to sink down, down, down into a dark and fathomless abyss,—on, on, ever down, down, and a weight pressing it so that it could not rise;—but oh, I forget, I am not come to that yet. Where was I?—I know. Yes, I was alone; and they sent for me, and I was to leave my country, my Italy, and come to England. They said it was my fatherland, and I ought to love it; that I was English, and bore an English name: and they blamed me for mourning after Italy; and they said the black sky of London was a clear sky, and that I was silly when I said the sun never shone in England. But I was right; the sun never shone for me in London, dreadful London!

“But there I staid; and I was to practise singing all day,—and not sing the songs I loved, but dull, dry exercises that my heart went not with. But I sang on, and they said I improved, and might sing at concerts soon. One night I was taken to a lady's house, and I was to sing to amuse her friends. There was a large party, and I had never sung before so many,

and I felt frightened ; and I missed the one voice that praised my singing, and loved it because it was my voice that sang. ‘ Ah ! madre mia, madre mia, tenera madre,’ ”—and again she stopped ; but rousing herself after a few moments, she went on : “ But when I tried to sing that evening, my voice shook, and I was spoken hastily to, and checked for my folly, and I trembled more ; and the company looked up at me astonished, as if they wondered why I sang, if I could sing no better. I felt so grieved ; I knew I could sing better, and I longed for one look or word of sympathy that should unlock my heart. And there came one to the piano, who had stood with folded arms, and a noble face, looking on, and he said in a gentle voice, and his eyes were full of kindness, ‘ Ours is not the land of song, like your Italy ; but think you are at home again, in your *bella Napoli*, and forget all our dull, uninteresting English faces, and you will sing to delight us all,’—and he smiled so kindly. I sat down again and sang, and they clapped their hands when I had finished, and cried ‘ Brava ;’ and he smiled, and said, ‘ I was a good counsellor, was I not ?’ And then he sat by me, and he talked of Italy, and its vines, and its orange-groves, and its cloudless skies, and I felt that I had met a friend, and I thought the sun did shine for me that night in London.

“ The day after that night, the lady at whose house I sang sent me a note, requesting me to call upon her when it was convenient to me. I went ; it was just the end of what you call your season : she told me she intended to pass that winter in Italy, and that she had wished to meet with some lady who understood

Italian to go with her, and that if I would like to go, she would be very glad of my company. Oh, my Italy! I was to visit you again. I did not hesitate; I thanked her so earnestly that she smiled.

“She was a kind old lady, rich and generous, and she was very good to me. I saw her two or three times more, and then she went into the country, and I was to meet her again in October. How I longed for it to come; and the hot, dreary streets of London grew more and more distasteful to me. It came at last, and all the arrangements were made for the journey, and we set off. It seemed as if joy and life would return to me when I once reached Italy again, and I felt lighter and gayer at the end of each day’s journey. Lady Dalrespie was very kind, and looked so glad when I grew bright and cheerful; and the days passed happily away, and on, on we journeyed till we reached my lovely Naples, my *bella Napoli*, and I looked down again upon its clear blue sea, and breathed its soft, sweet air, and saw old Vesuvius’ smouldering top, and the Sorrento hills in the distance, and I thought I should feel at home again. But there was something always wanted; she who had ever before looked on those bright scenes with me—who could fill her place? and my heart was desolate still.

“Lady Dalrespie did not go out much, but gave evening parties sometimes; and I sang, and all my fear was gone then, and they praised my singing, and talked to me, and were very kind. But none ever spoke like that gentle voice that comforted my lonely heart in London. I never asked who he was, and I

never mentioned him to Lady Dalrespie; but he would come sometimes back to my mind, as I sat out on the terrace of the villa we lived in, and looked down upon the sea,—and I wondered whether that voice was as gentle to all.

“I was very much alone: Lady Dalrespie was most kind, but I never felt able to open my heart to her; she would not have understood me: so I lived in myself and the world my brain imagined, and with the books I carried off to read. They were not good companions, I think now, but I thought them delightful then, for they fed the wild cravings of my mind. One evening I sat out late and alone. Oh! that evening! the moon on the sea was passing words in beauty, and I sat on and dreamed. I had a book in my hand, and as I leant over the stone balustrade the book dropped; it was not my own, and I was afraid to lose it. I thought I could get down and find it directly, but when I got down it was very steep, and I hardly knew how to keep my footing. I was rather frightened, and was looking round for a branch of a tree to hold by, when a voice said to me in Italian, ‘Let me help you,’ and a hand was held out. The language was Italian, but the voice was not; how well I knew it! but I gave no sign of recognition. I answered in Italian, thanked for the help afforded, and was soon in a place of safety. I would not have said one word to betray that that voice was not strange to me: if mine was not recognised, what pleasure would it have been to have claimed an acquaintance? I would rather have treasured my remembrance. But as the speaker held open the gate that led to the terrace, I turned to

thank him and wish him good-evening; the moon shone full on my face, and he looked at me and said, 'Surely I had the pleasure of meeting you this year in London?' and then we spoke a few words more. He told me he had only arrived that day in Naples, and had scrambled to the hill to watch the moon over the sea; he said he would call on Lady Dalrespie in the morning, and so we parted;—it had been well had we never met again.

"I told Lady Dalrespie of my adventure, and she seemed pleased, and said she had always had great pleasure in his society, and should be very glad to see him again. The morning came, and early, before luncheon, he came too. He came day after day, evening after evening. He talked and laughed with Lady Dalrespie, and then, when she leant back in her chair, and sat quiet, he talked with me. *We* did not laugh; no, we talked deeply and earnestly: he drew forth all the wild thoughts that had lain hidden in my own heart, and sympathized with them; and I learnt to keep all my thoughts till he came, and to pour them out to him. He seemed never wearied of listening, and a new life began, and I felt there was some one who cared for me again, and to whom I could open my heart,—and I missed my mother less. He was very, very clever, and I thought of him as a superior being, and looked up to him with a sort of reverence. I did not know then what I felt for him, and I never stopped to ask. I did not know the meaning of the beating heart and flushing cheek when his foot was heard without, the bounding of the heart when he appeared, the quickness of ear that would distinguish his step

above any other sound, the unconscious thrill of pleasure that came at the sight or hearing of everything connected, however remotely, with him. I only know that when he was present all was bright,—a new sun had arisen on my earth; and when he left me its rays seemed over me still, for I lived on the memory of his gentle words, his looks of sympathy, his kindling enthusiasm.

“Together we read, interchanged thoughts, or sang,—for he sang with me some of Italy’s impassioned music. His image was with me through the day, and haunted me at night. I was never really absent from him, for when he was not with me my thoughts were with him, holding communion, imagining his responsive words, conjuring up his every look. Ah, alas, alas! was it not idolatry?”—she covered her face with her hands, and her whole frame quivered while she murmured the words, “was it not, is it not?—Oh, help me, my God!”

Constance felt frightened for her, and doubted whether she ought to let her proceed; but the few words of caution she ventured upon were hastily silenced by Clara. “No,” she said, “it would excite me much more to tell it another time; now I have begun I must finish,—it will be a relief.” All this was said hurriedly, with her face averted; but suddenly she turned her eyes, which looked so large and hollow, upon Constance, and said, with mournful earnestness, “Dear, dear lady, do not you idolize him whom you love: sorrow must come, when the soul’s whole devotion is lavished at the shrine of a human, changeable heart. I did not know it then, but oh, I know it now;



—shall I never be able to break through the endless chains that bound me to it?”

It was some minutes before she resumed her history, and when she looked up there was the wild, wandering expression on her face, which at times passed over it. “Where was I?” she said, “where was I? Oh, back again in my bright world, before my sun had set. Yes, those bright, bright days, they were very beautiful. No cloud seemed to cross my sky; but I cannot tell you how they were passed, for I knew nothing of them, but as they brought him to me. How we sat together in the Villa Reali, drove along the Strada Nuova, looked down upon the bay; and I saw it all through his eyes. Dear Lady Dalrespie, how kind she was! I have thought sometimes since, it was strange that she did not say a warning word; but then she was old, and rather deaf, and she did not see very quickly, and I think she thought I was nothing more than a gay, careless child. We went from Naples to Rome, and when he heard we were going there, he fixed to go also; and Rome and Naples were all alike to me, for he who made my joy was with me still. But when we were at Rome, dear Lady Dalrespie was taken ill, very ill, and though the doctor was with her night and day, and I hardly left her bed-side, nothing we could do could keep her here, and she died;—she died, and I was alone again.

“Her son came over from England, but not in time to see her; and he paid off her servants, and dismissed them, and the house was given up, and I was there alone. Well had it been for me had I been really alone. Ah, my mother, did I not need you

then? I tried to think what would be best for me to do, but I could not think, it was dark, all dark. A clergyman and his wife were very kind to me. I suppose they saw more than Lady Dalrespie had seen, for they strongly urged my returning to London; but oh, London—what a waste and desert it appeared to me!

—Now it began to dawn upon me what I felt for him; and the dreadful suspicion awoke—perhaps I had given what was not returned. But no, it could not be: I could not have mistaken the tone, the look, though actual words had never told me that that heart was mine. I was perplexed and bewildered now; he was the only one whom it would have been any comfort to consult on my future course, and yet I could not have brought myself to ask his advice. I could not have talked calmly; and oh, how I feared to betray myself. I moved into the clergyman's house,—they kindly pressed me to do so,—and there he came often to see me, and joined me whenever I went out. I saw that Mr. and Mrs. Murray looked grave, and one day she very decidedly, but kindly, told me that she and her husband thought I was not doing wisely in remaining. She gave no reason, and I asked none, but I felt she was right; and oh! what a sinking and desolation of heart came over me. She told me she had friends who were intending to return soon to England, whom I could accompany; they were going by sea, and would take charge of me. I thanked her, and went to my own room to think. I debated long with myself, but could not decide. Evening came on, and I felt as if I could not rest where I was; the four

walls of the room seemed a prison that closed me in and suffocated me. I threw a shawl hastily over me, and putting on my bonnet, crept softly out. I cared not which way I went; air and freedom seemed necessary, and I wandered on. As I passed down one street, the door of a church was open, and the sound of soft, solemn music, with the peculiar perfume of the incense, was wafted into the street. I stopped and listened, and as I listened the desire came over me to go in, and I stole quietly in. There were but few worshippers, and the church was dimly lighted. I crept behind a pillar, and threw myself on my knees; it was more an instinctive impulse than a deliberate desire to seek strength; but if I did not pray, I wept in bitterness of soul. I thought I was all unheeded, but one was kneeling near me on whose ear the sounds of sorrow could never fall unpitied, and ere I rose I heard a soft step beside me. I looked up, and one in the simple dress of a Sister of Charity was bending over me, with a glance full of love and pity. She looked so calm, as if passion had never torn and racked her soul, and said to me, in a voice I shall never forget, 'My child, you are sad; turn to the Man of Sorrows: there is a joy that He giveth that no *man* taketh from you, and a sorrow of the world that worketh death; seek the one, and the other will be cast out.' She pressed my hand, and moved away. I knelt on, and when I rose I returned straight home, sought out Mrs. Murray, and said I would accept her offer.

"The next day he came as usual. He looked grave

and anxious now too, and I forgot my own sorrow in the desire to cheer and soothe him, and to see one of his happy looks come back. I could not tell him I had decided to go, but in the course of his visit he told me of a projected party to visit some ruins some miles from Rome, which was to take place in the course of a fortnight, and which Mr. and Mrs. Murray had promised to join, and added, 'And of course you will come also.' I told him then that in all probability I should have left Rome. He started, and said, with an impetuosity I had never before seen in him, 'Who has put this into your head? I am sure it is not your own wish,—it is some absurd fancy of another's. You must not go, you cannot go.' I could not answer him; I could only turn from him, and bury my face in the cushion of the sofa, to conceal the emotion his words caused. I cannot tell you more of that visit, but oh! it was but one of the many hours that riveted my heart to an earthly idol, and seemed to drain the life-blood from it."

She paused, and the quivering and trembling of her whole frame came on again, but she roused herself, and resumed in a low voice,—“I did resolve to go, I did keep to my determination, and I thought I had parted from him for ever. But after we were on board the steamer that was to take us to Marseilles, and the steam was up, there was a loud shouting, and a boat was pulled alongside, and he stood once more before me. I cannot recall that voyage,—it is too painful: my desolation seems more complete when I dwell upon it. It lasted many days, and when



I landed in England it was as his affianced bride. Yes, in all solemnity that promise had been exacted and given: I was to be his, he was to be mine; we were never to part any more. Oh, the intense joy of that hour, the peace, the repose that came over my heart; I thought it had found its haven. It was in sight, but I knew not the awful shipwreck that would come between. After a long, troublous voyage, to perish in sight of home has always seemed to me such a fearful, mournful fate. Such was mine. But who that had looked on that calm, still surface would have imagined the rocks that were beneath!

"We reached England, and again I found myself in London. There came a sinking of heart over me as I once more breathed its smoky atmosphere; but I argued with myself against it. He told me there were reasons why our engagement should be kept secret for the present. Little I cared, for I could hoard up my treasure in my own breast, and dwell on its priceless worth, and needed not to make others acquainted with my joy. I never doubted nor mistrusted him for a moment. Who that had looked on that face could have done so? And I do believe he was true then. He had arranged for me that I should have lodgings at a house in an old-fashioned part of London, which had belonged to his father, I think, but in which some old servants of the family still lived, and were allowed to let lodgings. And there he took me, and after seeing that everything was comfortably arranged, he left me to go to his own house. Day after day he came, and we read, and sang, and talked together, and London seemed as

bright as Naples to me then. But my heart missed one—my mother—on whom I could have leant; and sometimes I felt doubtful whether she would have been at ease, if she could have seen me now. But yet I knew not what to do: his presence was life to me—could I withdraw from it? Oh, those days, those days! bright days, terrible days! why did you ever come, if you could not last!" She paused again, and closed her eyes for some moments, and then opened them, and looked wildly at Constance, and asked, "Did you ever go out of the warm, joyous mid-day sun, into a cold, dark, dreary cavern? I did, and it has chilled me,"—and she shivered; "and the cold has pierced me through—here, here;" and she pressed her hand to her heart. It was some moments ere she spoke again, and then she whispered faintly, "You know what it was,—I need not say,—he ceased to love me."

Constance started: "Oh no, he could not, he did not leave you?" she said, almost imploringly.

"He did not leave me, but he came less and less; he came with cold, indifferent words, and a pre-occupied heart; it needed no explanation. A heart, a living, loving heart, with all its countless fibres of exquisite joy and agonizing grief, its springs of intense rapture and overpowering sorrow, was to him but a toy, to be played with for a little time, and when its novelty was over, to be cast aside for a new one."

"Oh, how dreadful, how fearfully heartless!" Constance murmured, while the tears rolled down her cheek.

"But he did not mean it at first, he could not have meant it," Clara answered eagerly;—it was misery to hear him condemned by another. "Oh no! I think at first he felt all he said; he did not intend to break my heart: but why then did he seek so earnestly to gain that which he did but cast from him when won? It was but a passage in the day-dream of his existence; but it was life to me,—life or death."

Again she paused, and the sighs, almost sobs, she heaved while she pressed her hands tightly over her heart, frightened Constance. Her tears fell fast, but Clara's eyes were tearless and fixed strainedly. Every now and then she murmured some words, but hardly audibly; "gone, gone," was the only one which Constance distinguished. She did not know what to do; she could not leave Clara in her present state, and yet to allow her to go on exciting herself by talking seemed such a risk. She moved to see if there was any water within reach to bathe her temples with, for the veins seemed swelling almost to bursting. Clara thought she was going, and held out her hand imploringly, and when Constance took it said, "Don't leave me, don't leave me; it will be a relief to tell you all. I shall soon be better."

Constance sat down beside her, and looked with an aching heart at the young creature whose life seemed to have been sacrificed to the cruel selfishness of another. For she could not excuse him as Clara did, but felt full of indignation at his reckless heartlessness; and her heart burned at the wrongs of another, as it never had had cause to burn for its own.

After a little while Clara went on :—" For a time he still came regularly every day, and though I waited for him sometimes hours that seemed days, yet he did come. But, alas ! when he came, my heart was so sad with its long, weary waiting, and his altered manner, that I could not be bright and gay, as I knew he liked me to be. And he looked dissatisfied, and I felt each day as if life and joy were slowly ebbing away, and it was harder and harder to keep up. Often, after he was gone, I sat and considered what it could be that had wrought the change ; and I blamed myself, and thought perhaps I was grown grave and gloomy, but alas ! I could not rouse myself. He alone could have done that. One heartfelt look of joy, as he came to me, would have done it,—nothing else could. After a time the daily visits ceased, and oh, those days that he came not ! the weary, wasting suspense, the eager, intent listening to every sound, with the sinking feeling of overpowering disappointment at each knock at the door, or step on the stairs ! I did nothing from morning till night but wait and weep. The good mistress of the house would bring me in food herself, and entreat me to eat ; and to gratify her I would try, but I never felt the want of it. I was always burning hot and thirsty, and my brain seemed on fire. When he came now his visits were short ; he looked ill, restless, and excited, but I had no longer the power to soothe and comfort him. I knew my fate was sealed, and that he waited but an opportunity, or perhaps courage, to break off his engagement, and yet I could not speak. I think I felt like one under sentence of death, and yet who dared not ask the day of his exe-

cution. There was a lingering, lurking hope that it could not be,—that the decree was not unalterably gone forth.

“But at last there came a time when day after day passed and he came not. It is a time I cannot recall. The suffering I endured seems to bewilder me even now. I suppose I looked very ill and strange, for without telling me anything of her intention, the landlady went to his house. She had been his nurse as a child, and could of course learn anything of his servants, and there she heard what my heart in its worst despair had foreboded.” She paused, and covered her face, and it was some moments before the words were murmured, “He loved another. This thought had flashed across me from time to time, but my mind started from it as a child’s does from some midnight terror, and I chid myself for indulging it. Now it was no longer a fearful suspicion, it was a crushing truth.

“It was evening when she returned home, and there was something in her manner that gave me a foreboding of evil; I tried to fancy that she had heard he was ill, or that some accident had befallen him, and entreated her to tell me all the truth. Had she told me of his death, I had not been more stunned. I believe she thought I bore it very well, and was quite relieved that her painful task was over. I do not know what I felt; I have a clear recollection of seeing her sitting opposite to me, and feeling as if it were a horrible nightmare that was upon me which would last as long as she sat, and yet that I had not the power to ask her to move. She got up at last, saying

something about hartshorn being good for the nerves. Poor good creature, I believe she went to get it: I waited but for her hand to turn on the door, and to hear her descending step, before I sprang into my own room, locked the door, then bolted it, and pushed a great trunk against it. I had the strongest inclination to scream violently, but a sort of instinct told me it would bring her back, and with a painful effort I suppressed it. She soon came to the door; I said something about being tired, and going to bed, in as calm a voice as I could, and wished her 'Good-night.' She lingered for some time, proposing remedies; each moment seemed an hour; but she went at last, and then I felt as if, whilst reason remained, I must act. I had no hesitation, no debate with myself for a moment, my resolution was made; I was an incumbrance to him, a weight he longed to throw off, he should not be burdened with it any longer. I would go, he should never hear of me more, I would not be an impediment to his happiness. All this time I don't think I thought about myself and my own feelings. The desire was strong upon me to get away, to rid him of me for ever. It seemed so strong, no other thought had place. How should I manage it? I must go to-night, go before any questions could be asked, so that no clue should be given him. I collected together all that he had given me,—jewels, books, music; each one had some treasured remembrance linked with it, but that mattered not, they must be returned; I sought them out and gathered them together, but as I did so my eye fell upon one little case that was always by my side. It had comforted me in many a lonely hour, for it pic-

tured his brightest look, and when my heart was full of anxious fears I would open this and gaze upon it, and forbid any doubt to arise. Who that had looked upon it could have ever thought deceit was in him? And yet it was not deceit,—oh no, it could not have been; he did not mean at first to deceive me.—But I will go on. I gathered all the others together, and put them into a box; *this* I could not part with;” and as she spoke she pressed her hand over something that was within the folds of her dress.

“I directed the box. Oh, the strange agony that came over me, as I felt I wrote that name for the last time. And when that was done, I began to think about myself. Hours had passed since I had first heard it; at least, so it seemed to me, and the house was quiet, as if all had retired for the night. I gathered a few things together, and took out what money I had, and crept down-stairs and out, without being heard. I walked to the corner of the street where there was a cab-stand, and thence drove to the station. I took a ticket—all the time feeling as if I were walking in my sleep—and came down here by the night-train. I had never been here before, but my aunt had given me full directions for the journey some months before, and all was clear to me, and I went on by the coach from the station. It was early morning when I arrived, and I did not like to go then to disturb my aunt, so I waited at the little inn. But I could not rest, and when the motion of travelling was over, which had seemed almost a help to me, I felt as if I must move still, and I wandered out. Presently I heard a sound that seemed strange, and

yet sweet to my ears. It was a Sunday morning, but that I had entirely forgotten, and the bell was ringing for early service. When I came in sight of the church, the bell ceased; I still went on towards it, as if drawn by an irresistible attraction, and reached the porch. The door, though closed, was not fastened, and impelled by the same desire that came over me in Rome, I opened it softly, and went in. It was the time of the early morning service, and how bright and calm it looked! My racking brain seemed momentarily soothed, and I sank on my knees near the door; but there was a strange, ringing sound in my ears, and I heard nothing till, like music from heaven, uprose a hymn of praise, and for a moment it seemed to rouse and revive me; then I suppose I sank in a fainting fit on the pavement, for I remember no more. The rest you know; how I ruptured a blood-vessel, which the doctor said saved me from a brain-fever. But it has left a disease that will kill me as surely, though not, alas! so quickly,—your English complaint, consumption;—and oh, come death, for life is a burden!" She ceased speaking, and leant back, as if thoroughly exhausted.

Her last words startled Constance, and she knew not what to say. Did *she* long for death? had she considered the hereafter? The same thought perhaps struck Clara, for before Constance had said anything, though longing to say some words of consolation, she raised herself, and said bitterly, "But ah, I am not fit for death. Hope, something like hope, came as I knelt that morning in church, but it has vanished ever since, and despair is at my heart."

All that Constance could say, all that would come to her mind was, "God is so merciful."

"Yes, if we will turn to Him," Clara answered, almost hastily: "but oh, for me, my heart cleaves to the dust. Every wish and longing turns from my Creator to His creature, and I sometimes feel as if I could give up everything, every hope, and desire nothing more, could I but once again see him sit beside me, and look with that deep tenderness into my eyes, and feel the pressure of his hand. Do you wonder now that I cannot receive God's minister? can you not understand that I cannot go through the mockery of professing to seek Him who reads the heart, when my heart is all given away from Him?" She stopped, and turned to Constance, as if expecting her to say something, but with a look of utter dejection, as if nothing that could be said would bring any relief.

Constance again felt as if no words would come, but after a moment's pause she said, gently and hesitatingly, "But could you not give it back to Him?"

"No, no, no!" Clara answered impetuously: "You know not what you say. Give it back! then I must tear out my idol, and tear out my heart with it. I thought I could once, but I cannot, I feel I cannot—I cannot part with this image of him;" and she pressed her hand over the miniature. "I have tested myself by that: when I can part with that—when I can bear to take my last look on it, then I shall know that my heart begins to break its bonds. But oh, it recoils from that effort now."

Constance felt as if she were awakening some one

from a death-like trance, as she said, "Try, oh, try, whilst you have strength and energy left."

"Strength and energy! I have none. No, he drained from me all the springs of life, and thought, and energy—all were drawn off into another channel, all flowed into his heart; and now that that outlet is closed to them, they are dead, stagnant, lifeless; and they had better be so, for if they were once to awake to life again, they would soon overleap their frail embankments."

It was some moments ere either of them spoke again, and then Clara said, "Sometimes I wonder if the one who has robbed me of this precious treasure, who now claims his heart, knows that she has broken a poor heart. Do you think it would cloud her happiness to know it? or is she too joyful in the possession of what she has won, to let a thought of sorrow come in?"

"Oh, she cannot know it; oh no! What woman could value love gained at such a dreadful price? it would not be joy, it would be misery."

"Not such love as his," Clara answered eagerly: "who could but value it, who had gained it!"

Constance saw that the excitement had been far too much for Clara, and she dreaded to let her speak more. She longed to tell her how much she felt for her, but feared in any way to excite her. It was a relief to her to hear Mrs. Lester's step on the gravel-walk.

Clara heard it too, and turned hurriedly to Constance, and said, "You will never speak of what I have told you? The past will soon be buried with me

in the grave, and then none need ever know of all my misery. It has been a relief to speak to you, but oh! say that none shall hear what I have said."

"I will never speak till you give me leave," Constance answered: "Oh that I could express how much I feel for you! But will you not, can you not, see my uncle? If you could make up your mind to speak to him, it would be such a relief."

"Never, never," Clara answered hastily: "Have I not told you why? When I can give up this treasured likeness of him, then I shall be able to forget the past, and can turn to other things; but that day will never come."

Mrs. Lester's step was at the door, and the two young friends bade each other farewell,—Constance's looks of sympathy telling more than words could have done. She instantly acceded to Clara's request that she would come soon again, and wishing Mrs. Lester (whom she met in the passage) good-bye, she turned sadly home—thinking how grievous it was that there should be such an one as Clara's heartless betrothed in the world. But the vision of her own Gerard arose, noble and true-hearted, and her mournful thoughts passed away.

CHAPTER XV.

“ If thus strange
And passing sweet our love, so given to change,
Then what must be the substance which remains,
Whose semblance here and shadow is so dear !”

THOUGHTS IN PAST YEARS.

CONSTANCE could not forget the sad history she had heard, and Clara's pale, wasted face, with its expression of despair, would rise ever before her, and she felt a repugnance, such as she had never felt before towards any human being, towards him who had caused this misery. Perhaps the being obliged to keep the mournful tale to herself, tended to make it leave a deeper impression ; for of late she had been accustomed to pour forth all that passed in her mind.

The second day after her visit to Clara, the morning's post brought her a letter that gave rise to the joyful exclamation, “ Oh, papa, he will come home to-day !” and all other thoughts, but of the expected meeting, passed from her mind.

Her father tried not to be unsympathizing, but it was not very easy to feel glad that she was to go from him. The days of their *tête-à-tête* had been enjoyed by him to the uttermost, and much as he liked Gerard, he would not have been sorry had his return been postponed a little longer.

Constance felt as if she could not settle to anything this morning, and paced up and down the

terrace, singing to herself as was her wont when full of joy, and feeling as if every tree and flower looked brighter than usual, and shared in her happiness. She suddenly remembered, that after Gerard's return, she should not have much time to herself, and might not be able to see Clara often, and so determined to go at once to Mrs. Lester's cottage.

She set off with a light step and bounding heart, little Woolly scampering round her, and certainly sharing in her glee, (whatever the trees and flowers might have done). As she drew near the house her joy became instinctively subdued, and she walked very gently up the gravel-path. Mrs. Lester, as usual, met her at the door: the account of the poor sufferer was much the same,—“Only she has become, if possible, more quiet than usual,” Mrs. Lester added. “There seems some sort of strange contest going on in her mind, for often after she has lain with her eyes closed for some time she will shudder, and murmur, ‘I cannot, I cannot; do not ask me.’ Perhaps her mind is wandering, poor child, for I think she is quite unconscious that I am in the room.”

Constance felt as if she understood what the contest was, and tears came into her eyes, but she made no comment; and after a little talk with Mrs. Lester, who always had many enquiries to make, and especially as to the time of Mr. Aubrey's return, she went in to Clara.

Mrs. Lester had preceded her,—told the important news that Mr. Aubrey would come back to-day,—intelligence which she concluded must be of paramount interest. And all connected with Constance did in-

terest Clara, and she tried to welcome her with a smile.

Though she had seen Constance each day since that one on which she had told her sad history, she had not reverted to it; but yet she felt that Constance understood her now, and there was much sympathy between them.

Clara seemed to be daily losing strength, but still, to Mrs. Lester's great distress, resolutely refused any visits from the Rector, and seemed to shut her eyes to the hereafter, though from death there appeared no shrinking. Poor Mrs. Lester! she had never had to do with one in so strange and sad a state of mind before, and was very unhappy. She received much comfort from the visits from the Rector; he told her that since they might not pray with Clara, they must pray all the more earnestly for her, and believe that even yet the gracious answer would come.

Constance sat with her as long as she could, and then, knowing that Gerard would start by the early train, hastened home. She had hardly entered the house, before the sound of wheels was heard. She flew to the morning-room—she could not meet him in the hall—and in a few moments his knock was heard at the door. It might have been a meeting after a year's separation, from the joy that was manifested; and when they spoke of the time that had intervened since he left, it was with the mutual feeling that the days might be numbered as months.

"Oh, Lily, I can never leave you again," Gerard exclaimed impetuously; "I cannot. You must have pity on me, and not keep me waiting till next year: I

sometimes feel as if it would never come." Much more was poured forth. It was a favourable time to urge his suit, for Constance felt as if she could refuse him nothing now; and before they had parted, he had prevailed on her to think that it would be possible to leave her father some time this year.

The days that followed were but a repetition of those that had gone before, ere Gerard's absence came to awaken them from their blissful trance; and Constance rather wondered that he was not content to wait. No happiness could be greater than that which they now enjoyed, she thought.

The Rector and Aunt Mabel generally passed the evenings at the Hall now; indeed, the former was much more with his brother than he used to be: he often found time to join him in the rides he took with Gerard and Constance, and frequently called in in the morning, and sat for half-an-hour or more with him. The father would not be sad when his child was so happy, but of course his home could not be what it was when he had her all to himself.

Percy had not yet been able to obtain leave, and Aunt Mabel thought it was just as well he should not, as he would certainly find Elvanlees very different from former days, now that their Lily seemed no longer common property to gladden all hearts.

The weather was very warm, and the whole party used to go out on the terrace after dinner, and stay there till it was quite late. Constance and Gerard sometimes wandered a little further, but seldom beyond a seat at the end of the long terrace.

Here they would sit for hours, sometimes in silence, feeling as if it were happiness enough to know that they were together; but at others, when the mood was on him, Gerard would talk earnestly, and with thrilling eloquence,—thought following thought so rapidly, that it seemed a marvel how words were found in which to clothe them; and Constance's mind would vibrate to his words, as if they ever found an echo and answer there.

Clara had not been visited for some days: one night when Constance went up to her own room after one of these evenings of exceeding happiness, her conscience reproached her for neglect. She determined to set off for Mrs. Lester's cottage as soon as possible the next morning. As usual, after breakfast, Gerard accompanied her to the morning-room; he opened the piano, and finding one of his favourite songs, begged Constance to sing it. She sat down, the recollection of her intended visit hanging over her; but the music and the comments upon it were so absorbing, that it passed away again; and it was not till the little time-piece struck twelve that she remembered her intention. It required a considerable effort to get up and fulfil it. And when she had told Gerard that she must leave him for an hour, his arguments to dissuade her made the effort greater still. "But I must go, Gerard," she answered appealingly; "it is to see a niece of Mrs. Lester's who is so ill, poor girl; and she sees no one but me."

This argument did not seem to have the weight with him which she expected, for he answered, "Lily, I cannot bear to leave you for anything, however

important, and you can go away from me at the first excuse."

She gave him one of her bright, gentle smiles then, for she knew he did not believe his own words, and said, "You would leave me, I know, Gerard, whenever it was your duty; and it is mine now, so you must not stop me."

A sort of sadness came over him at her words, which for once she did not notice, as she was resolutely closing her music-book, preparatory to departing. As she got up, she added, "I am quite ashamed of myself for finding it so difficult to follow duty instead of inclination." The words came out so simply, that he could not pretend any longer to think that she wished to leave him, and he begged to be allowed to walk with her, and wait in the park whilst she paid her visit.

When she left him to go up-stairs to prepare, he stood by the window, at first singing "*Bella siccome un angelo*," and then throwing a stick again and again for Woolly to run after, with an impetuosity that was fully appreciated by his little four-footed companion.

When they returned from their walk, Mr. Montrevor called Constance into the library, and told her that he had had a letter from an old college friend that morning, whom he had not seen for many years. He had written to tell him that he was coming to stay in the neighbourhood, and that he hoped to be able to get over to Elvanlees.

"The letter has been delayed a day or two, from his having put no post-town on the direction," Mr.

Montrevor remarked; "so he must have arrived by this time."

"Who does he say he is going to visit?" Constance asked: "Oh, I see, the Grahams," she added, looking at the letter again. "Has he a wife?"

"Yes, a wife, but no children, I think. I should like you to go over with me to call upon them, my child; and we must ask them to come here. I am sorry it should occur just now, as it will be very irksome to you, I fear; but I could not let them be in the neighbourhood without shewing them civility,—and you will not much mind, will you?"

"Oh, no, papa," Constance answered; it seemed a pleasure to make any little sacrifice for him now: "Shall you like to call there to-day? We can ride, I suppose?"

"Yes, if we go, we will ride, by all means; and I will ask Edward to go with us. I have observed," he added, with a smile that had a tinge of sadness in it, "that Gerard considers four a pleasanter number than three, when you are of the party. It will be as well to do it at once, so perhaps after luncheon you will put on your habit."

Gerard looked quite disappointed when Constance told him of the arrangements for the afternoon: morning calls were always distasteful to him. Nevertheless, the ride was a very enjoyable one, though the drawback of finding their friends at home occurred.

Mr. and Mrs. Erskine were pleasing people, and he and Mr. Montrevor were very glad to meet again;—they had travelled together for some weeks during the time that Mr. Montrevor was abroad before his

marriage, and many recollections of past days were awakened, as they recalled the place where they had last met. The invitation to Elvanlees was willingly accepted,—Mr. and Mrs. Graham being included. After they returned home from their ride, Mr. Montrevor asked Constance to write and invite two or three more friends, that he might have a pleasant party to meet Mr. Erskine.

She did so as cheerfully as she could, though she felt rather as if she were a child writing to fix the end of its holidays; and Gerard quite required consoling when she told him what she had been doing.

"I think we are really rather silly, Gerard," she said, after they had lamented a little together: "it will only be for two or three days, and I daresay we shall have some very pleasant hours in them; and how we shall enjoy the quiet of the days that will follow!"

That they enjoyed the days that intervened, there could have been no doubt, had they been watched as they passed the hours together. Gerard had persuaded Constance to let him take her picture: sketch after sketch was destroyed before he could at all satisfy himself; but yet he wearied not of his labour, and the depth and versatility of his conversation as he sat at his easel, made Constance forget that she was sitting opposite to him for any other purpose than to listen to his words. And certainly, if Gerard could have caught one of those bright expressions that flitted over her face, like the ever-varying lights on a summer's landscape, he would have made a very lovely picture.

Clara was not forgotten: Constance went twice to see her during the week, and though she could not stay

long, as she was always waited for without, the little visits seemed to cheer Clara. She did not allude to what was passing in her mind, but Constance hoped that there was greater peace;—perhaps less misery would be the truer expression. Her sympathy and affection for Clara deepened at each visit; there was something very loveable in the warm, enthusiastic disposition of the young girl, who had inherited much of an Italian's impassioned nature from her mother. And Constance's indignation rose, whenever she was with her, at the thought of him who had so cruelly made shipwreck of her happiness; and her imagination conjured up a vivid picture of the cold and heartless character which she attributed to the man who could do such a deed.

Their week's holiday, as they laughingly called it, passed away, and the day for the guests to arrive came: and Constance, in spite of entreaties "not to go just yet," was in the drawing-room when the first sound of wheels warned her that visitors were coming;—"Papa likes me to be in time" being to her sufficient reason. Gerard did not go into the drawing-room, but sat still in the morning-room, working away at the drapery of Constance's portrait, and humming and whistling alternately scraps of airs from operas, till the time-piece warned him that he must go up-stairs at once, or he should have little time to prepare for dinner.

The evening passed off better than Gerard had anticipated. He managed to sit next to Constance at dinner, though the office of conducting her to the dining-room did not devolve upon him. She tried

her best not to be dull nor absent whilst entertaining her guests, and charmed an elderly lady by the patience with which she listened to her lamentations on the difficulty of procuring a good cook. She smiled to herself to feel how instinctively she knew when Gerard entered the room after dinner, without turning her head, or raising her eyes, and what a different light all things seemed to wear then.

The next day after breakfast she found time to give him half an hour's sitting before returning to her visitors;—a *ruse* on his part to secure her company. As the Erskines were strangers to the neighbourhood, it was decided that they ought to see some of its beauties, and the ruins of Ulresford Abbey came first on the list. Everyone was pleased at the proposal. Some of the party were to ride, others to drive, and as it was a lovely day, the expedition seemed to promise much enjoyment. Constance was delighted; she had long wanted to shew Gerard Ulresford, which had always been such a favourite resort, and where, as children, she and her cousins had had many pleasant pic-nics. At the earliest opportunity, she flew off to the morning-room to tell him of the arrangements: he was still sitting at his easel, and his whole aspect brightened up as she came, almost dancing, into the room. "Oh, we shall have such a delightful afternoon, Gerard!" she began: "we are all to go to Ulresford, and you and I can ride;" and she burst forth merrily with

"Ah! non giunge uman pensiero
Al contento ond' io son pieno."

He looked at her with a glance of such exceeding

joy, that the heart had to relieve itself with a sigh after it, as if it were not able to contain such happiness.

"You must take your sketch-book, Gerard, and I will sit by you while you are sketching, and you shall give it me when it is finished, to be a little memorial of our visit to dear old Ulresford.—But I must go back to the drawing-room," was added in a rather graver tone. "Luncheon is to be at one: you will come in for it? Good-bye!" and she left the room; and the eyes of its occupant followed her to the door, and rested there after her retreating form had disappeared.

The ladies were to prepare for their expedition before luncheon, and immediately afterwards the carriages and horses came to the door. The mounting and setting off took some little time. Mr. Montrevor had long since generously given up his usual office of mounting Constance to Gerard, and he was waiting eagerly to-day to assist the slight form to spring into the saddle. She smiled at the rapidity with which he sprang into his own, and signed to her to set off at once, lest anyone else should intrude beside her. But she shook her head merrily, and waited till the two other ladies who were of the party were mounted; and then had the satisfaction of finding that she might allow Gerard to ride by her, without any slight to the rest of the party, who arranged themselves conveniently in pairs.

The riders went by a short road across the country, and arrived before the party in the carriages; they dismounted, and leaving their horses at a neighbouring farm-house, set off to walk to the ruins.

It was a lovely spot. The abbey, which was of the Early English style, stood in a narrow valley, through which a bright stream flowed, bounding in places over large blocks of stone, and forming fairy waterfalls. Much of the building was still nearly perfect, and the white mullions and tracery stood out clear and defined, the heavy buttresses throwing deep shadows on the walls, and the ivy and wild clematis growing luxuriantly, and wandering where they willed, seeming to rejoice that the hand of the pruner no longer disturbed their reign.

Constance knew every corner and crevice, almost every pillar and shaft. All its legends were familiar to her, and she could tell the history of each mutilated monument.

She shewed Gerard all her favourite points, and grew so animated whilst telling him an old legend, that he felt as if he could write a ballad on it on the spot, if those eyes would only look at him, and those earnest, touching words flow on.

The spot from which his sketch was to be made was decided on, and Constance, seated on a broken pillar, her hat thrown off, was beside him.

He sketched away, defining rapidly with his broad black pencil the masses of light and shade, and asking Constance questions to make her talk on; it was so pleasant to hear her voice, and her little histories.

"And whose tomb is that, Lily?" he asked, pointing to a canopied tomb which, built in the wall, remained nearly perfect.

"That is where the last Lady Abbess who died

here, was buried, before they were driven out at the Reformation."

"And don't you think they must have been very thankful to Harry the Eighth for releasing them from their confinement?" he asked.

Constance knew that this was more jest than earnest, and answered, "Gerard, you know you don't think that. I am quite indignant with him whenever I come here."

"They certainly must have had a very dull life of it, poor things! Don't you agree, my little Lily?"

"I always used to think when I was a child," she answered gravely, "how happy they must have been in this beautiful home, and doing good to all around them; because, you know, Gerard, they were not exactly cloistered nuns, they were more like Sisters of Charity."

"And you really think they were happy, and their hearts satisfied?" he asked, raising his eyes from his drawing to look at her while he spoke.

"I used to think so," she answered; "and I think now that those who could choose such a life, and be happy under it, must have a happiness of the noblest and truest kind."

"But could you choose it?" he asked.

She gave him no answer, and he turned his eyes from his drawing as if to ask for one. Her expression certainly conveyed some reply to him, for sketch-book, pencils, and all went down, as he said, bending over her,

"I only know that without thee
The sun himself is dark to me."

"Oh, Gerard, you will spoil your sketch," she said,

while she drew a little on one side, under pretence of picking it up.

"There are the invaders," he almost groaned out, as the rest of the party, who had been discreetly making the tour of the ruins in a body, appeared through an archway.

"Are you ready, Gerard?" called out Mr. Montrevor; "for we think it is time to set off.

The horses were brought out; Gerard did not vacate his place beside Constance till the hall-door was reached, and whilst assisting her to dismount, murmured, "Do make haste and dress, and come down to the morning-room before the gong sounds." She obeyed his injunctions, though they had been so late in returning home, that she had but a few minutes to give him.

There was, as usual, a request for music after dinner; Gerard came up to open the piano, and petitioned Constance for the song that had come forth in the fulness of her heart that morning, "Ah non giunge:" it was not sung less expressively in the evening.

The night was very warm, all the windows were opened, and a proposition made by some one to adjourn to the terrace, was almost universally acceded to. The saloon opened on the south side of the terrace, on the low stone balustrade of which several of the party seated themselves. The flower-garden lay below, reached by two broad flights of stone steps, on each side of which were placed urns of flowers; in the middle of the garden a little fountain rose, with its clear, trickling sound. In the beautiful moonlight, it looked almost like a fairy scene. Some of the party,

tempted by its beauty, wandered about; Constance and Gerard took possession of their favourite seat at the end of the terrace, which looked down on the flower-garden.

Constance watched the stars in silence, her calm, sweet face turned upwards, her heart too full for words.

Gerard's eyes were fixed on her, but she knew it not: "You look grave to-night, my sweet one," he said at length: "are you tired?"

"No, I am not tired," she answered; "and I do not feel grave, at least not sad. But is it not such a night as Southey describes?—

'Bright and so beautiful was that fair night,

It might have calm'd the gay amid their mirth;'"—

and she raised her eyes again to the starry heavens.

Gerard could not withdraw his from their fixed gaze. Presently she gave a slight start, and a momentary look of distress passed over her face.

"What is it, my Lily?" he asked.

She tried to smile, and said, "Oh, nothing,—but a beautiful, bright star that I was watching seemed to shoot suddenly downwards and disappear;" and her face still looked troubled. "I am not superstitious," she continued after a pause; "but that falling star has given me such a strange feeling. It is so very foolish;" and she tried to smile again, as Gerard watched her.

"We will take a turn on the terrace," he said; and they rose and walked for a few minutes, till, finding that many were returned to the saloon, Constance moved to go in also.

There was a little more music, and then the dinner visitors departed, and the rest of the party separated for the night. Gerard lighted Constance's candle for her, and said, "You have forgotten the falling star?"

She smiled, but said, "I wish I had not seen it."

He murmured, as he followed her to the stairs, "We have had a delicious day, Lily; and to-morrow shall be brighter still."

As her maid was leaving her room that night, she said, "I forgot, Ma'am, to give you a parcel Miss Lester sent up for you this afternoon. It came whilst you were out riding; but they said there was no answer required;" and she put what looked like a small book on Constance's dressing-table, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

*"L'infamie est pareille, et suit également
Le guerrier sans courage, et le perfide amant."*

CORNWILLE.

CONSTANCE did not at once open the little parcel, but walked to the window, drew aside the curtains, and looked out. Her room looked on the bright flower-garden, with its murmuring fountain, and the moon still shone over all. It was in truth a lovely night, and Gerard's words were sounding in her ear,—“To-morrow shall be brighter still.” Yes, her life was all brightness now, all sunshine without shadow, and her thoughts turned to poor Clara, on whose dark path no gleams of light seemed to shine. She turned again to her dressing-table, and took up the little parcel. “My ‘Christian Year,’” she thought: “how soon she has returned it;” and she broke the seal. A little note fell out, which she opened and read: it seemed to have been written with a very trembling hand, and under great mental agitation, and was as follows:—

“MY DEAR MISS MONTREVOR,

“You proposed to me some time since a sacrifice which I rejected instantly, as beyond my strength; but your words have haunted me ever since, and my inmost soul has confessed that it must be made, if ever I would look for peace here or hereafter. I do not understand how strength has at last been given me. I feel as if it must be an answer to others’

prayers, not to my own; they have been too faint and feeble, made with only half a heart: but strength has come, and ere it fails I will act. I send you my last earthly treasure—that which I once told you I could never part with—and now will try to turn my heart elsewhere. I will see the Rector as soon as he can come. Will you put the enclosed safely away? I dare not trust it within my reach. If it is not too earthly a feeling, I would ask that it might be buried with me in the grave; but if this be a too great clinging to the past, I will try to overcome it. Before you put it away, will you, to please me, look once upon it? and when you have looked on that face, I think you will not wonder that I loved with what I feel now was such a fearful love. I can hardly collect my thoughts to write.

“Yours, ever gratefully and affectionately,

“CLARA.”

It was with a mingled feeling of pain and interest that Constance turned to look for the miniature. She did not unclasp it at once. Clara's deceiver again rose before her, as she had ever imagined him to herself, with a gay, cold, heartless look, and it was almost painful to feel that she should really look on the face that her mind had ever turned from with such abhorrence.

With these feelings strong upon her, she opened the case. What features met her gaze? Where was the cold, heartless look she had expected?

This Clara's faithless lover!

This!—her own true, noble Gerard!

She was so utterly bewildered that she understood nothing; she did not even believe what her eyes had seen, but sat with her hands clasped, her eyes fixed like one paralysed.

But again she seized the miniature which in her amazement she had let fall, and as she grasped it the picture fell loose from the case: words were written on the back. She read them, while she gasped for breath; they were—"Clara: from Gerard Clifford."

The handwriting was too fearfully familiar to her to be mistaken. She pressed her hands wildly to her temples, felt a shriek of horror escaping her, and fell fainting on the floor.

She knew not how long she lay there, but at last, trembling and bewildered, she opened her eyes, and felt as if awaking from some awful dream. Her candle was still burning, though the early streaks of dawn were entering through the undrawn curtains. She could not at first understand where she was, or how she came to be lying on the floor; but she roused herself with a great effort, and her eyes fell on the fatal case: she closed them instantly, to try to fancy that she was dreaming. It could not be that her whole happiness was thus in a moment gone; it could not be true.

She moved, that she might make herself comprehend whether she slept, and was under the influence of some horrible dream; and as she raised her head, that drooped with the utter prostration of misery, the open miniature met her gaze again, and groaning, she sank back on the floor. By slow degrees the dreadful truth forced itself upon her, but again

and again her heart refused to believe it, and would conjure up every imaginable obstacle.

But for those written words, she would have stilled her wild misery with the thought that the miniature came by some strange chance, possible or impossible, she cared not how, into Clara's possession,—but oh, that writing, those words!

Gerard was it, who had won that poor young heart, had played with it for a little time, and then, pierced, wounded, and broken, had cast it from him? “Oh, Gerard, Gerard, my own, my own,” she groaned forth, while she lay moaning, as one in great bodily pain. “Oh, it is some dreadful delusion, or I must have a brain fever,” she said; and then murmured, “Gerard, Gerard, tell me you are true: I cannot lose you. Oh, let me die! It is too horrible.” And again unconsciousness seemed mercifully sent to still the wild agony.

The night wore away in paroxysms of mental anguish, followed by fits of entire exhaustion. Sometimes the truth was all clear to her, and then she felt like one who had robbed another of her most precious treasure, and must at any cost or suffering restore it. Gerard was not her's, he was Clara's; he was bound to her by earlier vows, she had no right to think of him; she must give him up; and then the pang of agony that would pierce her soul made her feel that death alone could part her from him.

And thus the crushed spirit lay writhing in its agony,—agony that seemed too great for human strength, and must rend in twain the quivering, almost bursting, heart.

But yet as the truth became clearer to her, the conviction that, come what may, she must give him up, forced itself upon her. The precious jewel treasured in her young heart must be torn out. Alas! she knew not till that moment how firmly it was bound and entwined with the very fibres of that heart. Fearful wrench, fearful dislocation of the whole soul! And oh! bitterest wound! the beautiful ideal her heart had loved must be given up.

In thought even, in the hallowed treasury of memory, he might never keep his place. To have been called to resign him, truthful, noble, honoured, such as he was in her tender, adoring thoughts, would have been in comparison a trifling wound. But to dash away for ever his image from her mind—to feel that it was false, unreal, deceitful as the mirage of the desert,—oh, sorrow! oh, woe unutterable!

Hour after hour had worn away, while she lay there alone with her misery, and now she knew by the sounds of moving in the house that morning had come. She roused herself sufficiently to remember that she should not like her maid to come in and find her lying on the floor, her bed untouched, so she dragged herself to it, and threw herself upon it—the miniature, from which yet she seemed to shrink, clasped in her hand.

She was too much exhausted to think any more; she tried to keep firmly before her the resolution she had made to part with Gerard that day, and she felt it must be acted upon without delay, ere strength failed. So she lay with her eyes closed, but tearless, and the anguish-stricken heart ever seeming to

groan forth from its depths of misery, "He is not mine, not mine."

Thoroughly prostrated in mind and body, she sank into a kind of sleep; but this temporary respite was of short duration, for she was soon startled by the accustomed knock at the door, and awoke with the crushing sense of undefinable misery upon her. She knew that she could not see anyone, and calmed her voice to tell the maid she would ring for her when she required her. She did not know what she felt, as she raised herself up weariedly and languidly, and tried to look her sorrow in the face, and understand what it was that thus bowed her to the earth; but she could grasp nothing, realize nothing; she only knew that trouble and anguish had taken hold of her. The sun had left the heavens, and she was groping on in darkness. She remembered that there were visitors in the house, and that she should have to appear at breakfast, and she tried to collect her thoughts so as to go through the routine of dressing without summoning her maid. She felt that she must be alone, and she strove to keep her mind from awakening to full consciousness, to keep it in its trance-like state of misery.

She was dressed at last. By a kind of instinct she put on a calm look, as she passed down the stairs to the dining-room, but when she reached the hall she trembled so violently that she turned into the morning-room to gain breath. She would not let herself think, and made a strong effort to command her emotion; but it would not do, and she felt that if she ventured

into the dining-room she must betray herself: so seizing a scrap of paper, she hastily wrote a few lines to her father, saying she had a violent head-ache, which was very true, and feared she must keep quiet for a few hours, and asked him to apologise for her non-appearance at breakfast;—fearing he might come to see her, she added a line, saying, she believed she should be better quite alone. This written, she rang the bell, keeping herself rigidly composed till the servant had answered it; but as he turned the handle of the door, she sprang up, fastened it after him, drew down all the blinds, so that no one walking on the terrace should know she was there, and threw herself on the sofa, burying her face in the cushions. She had felt as if relief would come, when there was no longer any need to rouse herself; but what relief was there in the throbbing of the distracted brain, and in the weary, restless turning of the aching mind from side to side, as if it would fain escape from the consciousness of the sorrow under which it was writhing.

The slow moments, with their weight of misery, passed away. From time to time, as the dining-room door was opened, the hum of voices reached her; but they fell on her ear with a dull, meaningless sound, as if they came from another world, in which she had no longer any lot or portion. The world of yesterday was separated from that of to-day by an unfathomable gulf, which she could never pass and stand where she stood before.

But soon there came a sound that roused her attention to the acutest point, and would have been

heard above any tumult of noise. A step came softly to the door, it stopped there, and then a little knock was heard. With what a throb of joy had that sound ever been heard before! "I cannot," she almost groaned forth to herself; the words were unheard, and it was mistaken for a permission to enter. "May I come in?" was said, as the fastened door refused to open.

"It must be; I cannot escape from it," she thought, as she rose tremblingly from her seat. She unlocked the door, returned to the sofa, buried her face in her hands, before she could say the words, "Come in."

Gerard opened the door, and stood before her—a look of anxious tenderness on his face. She could have thrown herself at his feet, and implored him to tell her that it was all false,—that he was true, upright, honourable, as she believed him, and all the past misery was a fearful dream.

But she seemed spell-bound, and could not even raise her eyes. He feared she was very ill, and said, in an anxious tone, as he stood before her, "Constance, darling Lily, what is the matter? are you very ill?" He was going to seize one of her hands, but she pressed them more firmly together, and shook her head.

"Oh speak; I cannot bear it!" he exclaimed: "what is it?"

She tried to speak, but neither her mind nor her lips could frame any words. He drew a chair close to the sofa, and was going to throw his arm round her, but she instinctively shrank from him.

"Oh, Constance, dearest, speak," he said, tremblingly: "Why do you shrink from me? tell me what is the matter with you."

She could not speak, and her silence quite frightened him. He started up and paced the room, and then stood again before her, saying, "Tell me what it is; say anything, only speak."

The miniature was on her lap,—drawing one hand from her eyes, she raised it up, and dropping it with her hand on the table before him, she raised her eyes imploringly to his face, as if to entreat him to disprove the evidence it bore. Had a bullet entered through the window and pierced Gerard, he had not started more; he threw the case from him, he did not speak, he trembled more than Constance, he almost groaned, and there was a hollow, sepulchral tone in his voice when he gasped forth the words, "Ha! this is dreadful revenge."

The unjust accusation seemed to force Constance to speak: "No, no, not revenge: she knew nothing, and I knew nothing. She is here dying; she did not know that I had ever seen you when she sent it to me to keep, not daring to trust it longer in her own possession, as it drew her heart from heaven. She is the sick girl whom I told you I went to visit." The words came with great difficulty, her head sank as she ceased speaking, her hands were convulsively clasped.

"She has told you all, then, and made you feel cold towards me. Constance, this *is* agony," Gerard gasped forth.—The sight of his grief seemed more than she could bear.—"Speak, for mercy's sake,"

he went on; "say but once that you love me still! You are not changed, my own, my precious one? Oh, one word!" He bent, half-kneeling, beside her, and she could hear the throbbing of his heart. His words were poured forth in a tone of agony, imploring her to speak; she tried, but no words would come.

"Oh, you will not, you cannot cast me from you? you know my whole inmost heart is yours,—you will not reject it?"

"I may not keep it," she whispered, faintly; "I have no right to it."

"No right, Constance, no right? when it loves and adores but you—lives but for you!"

"I knew not—God knows that I knew not," she said, gaining strength as she spoke, "that I was taking what belonged to another; but I cannot, I may not keep it. It is not mine,—it ought not to be,—it must be given back."

"It cannot be; it is impossible! Oh, why such useless words? why rend your own heart and mine by such dreadful thoughts? You cannot mean what you say."

"Gerard, I must mean it; I must force myself to mean it."

"To mean what, Lily? to give me up?" He started up, and with clenched fist smote his forehead,—"*This* is more than I can endure."

"*She* had to endure it," was in Constance's aching mind, but she gave not vent to the thought; she would not add one drop to his cup of sorrow. She felt as if her vital powers were failing, and that she

must end this dreadful struggle. She made a half-movement, but he was at her side in a moment, murmuring, "Oh, Lily, leave me not, leave me not! Surely you speak so to try me. What is it that has so shocked you, my precious one? You don't know the world, or you would not think of this as you do now; such things are so common."

She raised her eyes mournfully, almost reproachfully, to him, and said, "In the world it is common to win a young, loving, trusting heart, to rest not till you have made it your own; and then, when you have taught its life to hang upon your love, to cast it coldly, unconcernedly from you. Then, Gerard, if it is so, I never thought you belonged to what you call the world. But oh! forgive me the harsh words,—I thought of you as something noble, true, good beyond expression;—the shock is too dreadful."

"But it will pass; you will forget it, and pardon me."

"Gerard," she said, while her brain seemed to reel with agony, "I will pardon all that I have to pardon, but it will not pass in the sense you mean. No; I should feel most guilty, could I retain that love which has been pledged to another. Oh, Gerard, you have not watched her slowly withering, dying of a broken heart, or you could not be so cruel as to wish to add to that agony. Think what it would be to her, to hear that he whose love was solemnly pledged to her, and whilst the loss of that love was eating out her life, was rejoicing with another. I know what it would have been to me,—I could not bring such misery on another."

"Lily, I did not mean it,—I could not help it. When I saw you again, I seemed drawn towards you by an irresistible attraction. I did keep away at first, and tried not to think of you."

"Oh, what misery would have been spared if you had never seen me!"

"And you wish that you had never seen me?" he asked, in a tone of mournful bitterness, fixing his eyes upon her: "is it come to that? Constance, can you say you wish you had never seen me?"

"I cannot, Gerard; I ought, but I cannot. But I must not stay. I am very weak. Poor, poor Clara!" she murmured to herself, "I know now what you had to bear. Gerard, I must go." She stood up, raising herself with difficulty, for every limb shook.

Again, with words and looks of imploring earnestness, he entreated her not to leave him, not to say all hope was over: time would soften the shock, he argued; she would not feel it as she did now. He would wait years, would she but say some time she might think differently. What passionate emotions, what agony wrung her heart at his words, cannot be expressed; each one struck on it with a keen pang of anguish. To spare him, she felt as if she could have gone through anything; but her whole nature had received a shock. He was no longer the noble-hearted one who was to lead her on, to be the guardian and guide of her youth, to strengthen all those floating longings and desires after good that so often stirred within her. "Love" she knew she must ever feel, but where was the "honour" that had been the groundwork of her love. A change had come over

all. Her duty seemed clear before her, and ere her failing strength made it impossible, she nerved herself to speak.

She held by a chair for support, her head was bent down, and her slight figure drooped and trembled like a flower that had been crushed by a storm; her words came with difficulty:—"I cannot, I may not; it is useless to say there is hope. Gerard, I have loved you truly, I will not shrink from owning it now; perhaps I have loved you too much,—I never knew how much till now. To spare you suffering, I would have gone through anything;—I had hoped my life would have been devoted to you, to cheer, to comfort, and to serve you. But now it may not, it cannot be." She paused to gain strength to finish her sentence; he spoke not, but stood beside her like one whom grief had stunned; and after a few moments, without raising her eyes, she went on: "We may never meet again here: forgive me all the suffering I have caused you; I was a temptation to you, but I knew it not; and I have brought you to great sorrow, but I cannot help it:" she tried to go on speaking, but the room seemed turning round with her, and noise like thunder rang in her ears; she had tasked herself beyond her strength, the fainting-fit she had been struggling to keep off overcame her, and she sank on the floor.

Gerard's arm was round her almost ere she fell. He raised the precious form, he could hardly part with it, but he laid her gently down, his agonizing grief stilled and awed by that death-like trance, and knelt by the sofa, altogether forgetting that anything

should be done to revive her, but longing that he could lie down and die beside her. Some moments passed; moments and hours were all alike to him then, he took no note of time; but Mr. Montrevor's voice was heard in the hall,—he was coming to the room: the sound recalled Gerard to himself; what should he do? how could he meet him? Had he killed his child?

There was no need for any explanation, for Mr. Montrevor's dismay at the sight of Constance made him think of nothing but what was to be done for her. "Has she fainted?" he asked: "Oh, ring for some one."

He pulled the bell violently as he spoke; for Gerard did not move, but knelt on beside the sofa, sunk again into that almost unconscious state from which Mr. Montrevor's coming had momentarily aroused him. The bell was quickly answered. "Send Roberts directly; bring cold water," Mr. Montrevor exclaimed hurriedly, and the man disappeared ere the words were finished. "Oh, Gerard, what must we do? I'll send for the doctor," he went on, in a frightened tone. But Gerard answered not.

The maid appeared, and instantly commenced bathing the temples with eau-de-cologne, and applying smelling-salts. The coldness of her mistress' hands seemed quite to startle her, and she said that she thought that it would be better that she should be taken to her room immediately.

"I will carry her gently up at once," Mr. Montrevor said; but with a look of mournful, earnest entreaty, Gerard whispered, "Oh, for the love of heaven, let me; this once, only this once!"

The father could not refuse; that mournful look

would admit of no denial,—it almost frightened him; for knowing nothing of what had passed, he thought it betokened great alarm on Gerard's part at Constance's state.

With a trembling step, a face almost as white as the marble face that rested so motionless upon his arm, and a heart that seemed as if it had ceased to beat, Gerard bore his precious burthen. He never moved his eyes from that face; he seemed as if he would imprint it for ever on his mind, and was draining the last drop in his cup of happiness; for, compared with what was to come, it was almost happiness,—he had her still.

But the room was reached at last, though he moved at the slowest pace, and he had nought to do but to lay her down, and feel as he did so that he laid down with her all joy, all peace, all the sunshine of his life, and entered from that moment into the deepest gloom. "My punishment is greater than I can bear," was his thought, as he turned, gave one long last look at her, and strode down the stairs. His look of misery scared the servants whom he encountered, and they thought to a certainty their young mistress was dying; but Gerard saw them not, nor their anxious glances, but strode on with long, hasty steps, as if he were flying from some deadly pursuer. He passed through the hall, out at the front door, and into the park. "Lost, lost," he muttered between his teeth, and groaned aloud, looking wildly around him, and then strode on again.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Is this a dream?"

No,—'tis a dreadful waking."

TALFOURD.

CONSTANCE lay still and deathlike in the trance into which she had fallen; and when at last she was aroused, she looked around her with a frightened look, and said, "Oh, it's not true, it cannot be true!" and seemed sinking again into unconsciousness. One of Mr. Montrevor's first directions had been to send for Aunt Mabel, and she was now beside the bed. They felt they must not allow the faintness to overcome her again, and used every effort to arouse her: sighs and sobs came as she opened her eyes, but no tears. She turned her head restlessly from side to side, and said at length, "Aunt Mabel, what is it? where am I? speak. Have not weeks passed away? I have had such a horrible dream,—but it is a dream; I shall forget it soon. But how did I come here? I thought I was up. Have I been ill? has anything dreadful happened?"

Aunt Mabel was frightened by her looks, and, dismissing the maid, answered calmly, "You have not been ill, dear, but you have had a fainting fit."

Constance looked at her as if she hardly understood her words, and gasped forth faintly, "And Gerard, where is Gerard?"

"He is down stairs," Aunt Mabel answered, in the same calm tone.

"Have I seen him to-day?"

Aunt Mabel looked at Mr. Montrevor for an answer.

"Yes, my child," he said; "he came to you in the morning-room after breakfast."

"Oh, then it is not a dream, it's true," she almost shrieked. "Oh help me, help me!"

"What is it, my darling?" her father exclaimed, putting his arm around her.

"I must never see him again—never, never; oh, he is gone for ever!" she groaned forth; while her eyes opened wildly, and the veins rose on her temples.

"No, my child, he is not gone," her father answered soothingly; while he whispered, in a tone of agony, to Aunt Mabel to see instantly for the doctor.

Constance looked at her father fixedly, as if she were collecting all her strength and reason for one effort, and said, in a voice that frightened him as much by its sudden unnatural calmness as her former tone of excitement had done, "Yes, he is gone,—he must go for ever from me,—I must never see him again. Do not let me see him, papa; I could never part from him if I did; and he is not mine,—I must give him up. You must see him: speak kindly to him; tell him I cannot trust myself to see him again. I am so sorry to make him unhappy. I have so much to say," she went on, the sentences coming out with an effort, and a pause between each; "but I am so tired, I cannot say it now;—but remember, papa, I must never see him again. It is night now, is it not? Good-night, it's so dark;" and she closed her eyes, and sank again into a fainting fit.

The doctor had arrived long before they could arouse

her from this attack ; and when at last she opened her eyes, she knew no one, but murmured on unconsciously, begging them to take her from this dreadful place, and not to let Gerard be hurt, and then calling for Clara, and praying her to forgive her. The day wore away at last, without bringing any relief. Mr. Montrevor did not leave her room, or its adjoining dressing-room, all day, but waited in mournful suspense the effect of the remedies applied. The visitors had all departed, knowing how distressing at such a time must be the presence of strangers in the house, and he and Aunt Mabel were alone.

It was a fearful night of anxiety that they passed beside her bed. The doctor slept in the house, and was frequently in the room, but none of the remedies resorted to seemed to subdue the fever of the brain ; and the wild bursts of grief, and the low moans and murmured expressions of despair and anguish went on, and alone broke the stillness of those long hours of darkness. She seemed often to imagine herself with Gerard, and in gentle, tender words prayed him to be comforted, and to return to Clara ; and then she would almost fiercely accuse herself of having killed Clara, and broken her heart, and tell Gerard he must depart, and never let her see him again ; but almost ere the words were ended, the voice would change to the gentle, loving tone, and words of consolation would be uttered. Several times she started, and exclaimed, " Ah, the beautiful star,—I felt it was too bright to last !"

There was no doubt in either Mr. Montrevor's or Aunt Mabel's mind now as to what had caused her

illness, though how these circumstances that she unconsciously revealed had been made known to her they did not understand. It may be imagined what her father's feelings were, as he discovered that the one to whom he had intrusted the most precious treasure of his heart had proved himself unworthy of it, and perhaps—but that was a thought too dreadful to dwell on—had broken her young, loving heart. At times he almost longed to rush from the room, seek Gerard, and demand an explanation of what had occurred, and accuse him as the author of all this misery; but then his child's last conscious words, "Speak kindly to him," seemed to hold him back.

And where was he who had brought sorrow and anguish upon those who loved him,—who, by recklessly pursuing his own desires and inclinations, had wrecked the happiness of the being most precious to him on earth, and filled his own soul with despair? When he left the house, he had wandered on for miles, unconscious where he went, and of all that met his sight, or of the passing of time; conscious only that he was anguish-stricken, but unable to realize the cause. When his physical powers began to fail, he sat down and leant against a tree, and it was not till the shades of evening were falling that he roused himself to consider where he was, what had brought him there, and what he had to do. At first he thought he could not return to Elvanlees,—he felt like one exiled from paradise; but then the overpowering desire to know how Constance was, to be once more under the same roof with her, overcame all other feelings, and he began to consider how he should return;

for he was entirely ignorant of the road he had travelled, and though he tried to retrace his steps, night had quite set in before he reached the outskirts of the park. Uncertain which path to take, he followed one which he thought, as far as he could rouse his bewildered mind to recollect, must lead to the house;—it led to Mrs. Léster's cottage. A light glimmered in a window, and he thought he must be drawing near one of the keeper's lodges, where he could gain information as to his route, so he directed his steps towards it. The ground rose a little in front of the house, though it fell abruptly on the other side, and by standing on the bank a clear view was gained of the room where the light was. He stopped for a moment to observe on which side was the door, when his eyes met a sight that rivetted him to the spot, though he hardly knew whether what he saw was real.

Clara had had a day of more than usual suffering and exhaustion, and when evening came on had entreated earnestly not to be moved from her sofa, but to be allowed to pass the night down stairs. Her aunt, though fearing it would do her harm, did not like to refuse; and, supported by pillows, she lay with her hands clasped, her hollow, sunken cheeks colourless, her eyes fixed and motionless, with a longing, mournful expression. Thus she met his gaze who had brought her to this state. The blind had been pulled up and the curtains undrawn, that the room might be cooler, and the light within, while it made every object visible to those without, effectually prevented anything external from being discerned. So, utterly unconscious whose eye was upon her, the poor broken-

hearted one murmured forth her mournful complaint: she was trying to teach her heart to forget him who had so engrossed it, that she might turn it where love can never be unrequited. But oh, it was a hard lesson, and ever uprose the longing that she could but see him once more, and take a last farewell ere she exiled his memory for ever from her heart. Little she knew how near he was to her then. But well was it for her that darkness veiled him from her sight; one look of him she so loved might have rivetted indissolubly that chain she now feebly tried to unclasp.

Gerard stood as one fascinated—as if he had no power to move. For a moment he was horror-struck, as the thought flashed across him “Who was it who had brought her to death’s door?” but remorse was swallowed up in the recollection that she had separated him from Constance; and his own misery made him almost dead and callous to the intensity of the suffering he had caused. But some of the words Constance had said to him that morning came with clear distinctness to his mind, as if whispered in his ear,—“Slowly withering, dying of a broken heart,”—and he shuddered and closed his eyes: it was not, though, at the sight which was then before him that he shuddered, but at the image his imagination conjured up—that perhaps she who had said the words would now share that fate.

When he opened his eyes again Clara’s whole expression was altered; her eyes were closed and her hands joined, as if in prayer; the agonized expression had passed away, and there was a look of peace on the worn face. A new thought awoke in him,—“She

prays;—prayer may yet save Constance, and restore her to me.” He tried to murmur forth some words of prayer, but his was not then a heart that could pray. No peace came to him—no thought of Him who hears prayer could penetrate into that soul, which sought but its own will, and cared not whether that will were in accordance with God’s will, or how its accomplishment were attained. “Give me what I want,” was the heart’s restless, impatient cry, though the words that clothed it strove to disguise its meaning.

Filled with deeper gloom than ever, he tried to resume his way: he reached, at last, the house. A light burned in one window, whilst all the rest were in darkness. On that window his eyes were fixed, there his heart turned, that was the one spot on earth to which it wildly clung.

Long he lingered there; he held his breath, he strained his ears, if perchance some faint sound might reach him, some sound to say that she yet lived, that he was not her murderer; but all was still,—the silence of death, it seemed to him! With slow and heavy steps he dragged himself round the house to the side of the terrace on which the morning-room opened. The windows were open; in the alarm occasioned by Constance’s sudden illness, they had forgotten to close them. The moon began slowly to rise, and her solemn light revealed the objects of earth, while it gave to them an unearthly and spectre-like appearance.

Gerard crept in. Her harp was uncovered, her music-book was open; he himself had placed it there that very morning, ere she had left her room. Was

it that morning? was it not a century before? and had he not awoke from the sleep of the grave and come back to earth, to find all he had known and loved passed away, and to be alone, a homeless wanderer on the face of the globe?

The moon rose in cloudless splendour, and on he sat. The night was cold and damp, but he left the windows unclosed, and felt nothing but the fire that seemed to burn and gnaw at his heart and brain. Oh that long night! how did its hours ever wear away? He dozed at intervals, but never sank into forgetfulness; ever his misery was upon him, a weight that bowed him to the earth. At times the past bright days would return,—he would be seated beside Constance, holding her soft hand, looking into her eyes, and murmuring words of tenderness; but between them, before them, beside them, wherever he turned, would come the wan, ghastly form of her he had forsaken, and clasp her hands in agony, as he had seen her clasp them this evening, and whisper, in a piercing, hollow whisper, “You are not hers—you are mine;” and Constance would shudder, and turn from him with loathing.

At length the streaks of light that herald the approach of day appeared, and the air grew colder, but still on he sat. The sun rose and poured its glorious flood of light into the room, but he moved not. Signs of life and motion, hushed and faint, were heard in the house, but he heard them not,—all was as the stillness of the tomb to him. Once he looked round the room, when first the sun enlightened it; but each object in it recalled such hours of joy which had for

ever passed, that he shivered and fixed his eyes on the ground.

Nine o'clock struck. The old bell, for the first time for many years, was silent, and rang not out its morning peal. Gerard began to awake to a consciousness that he could not sit there for ever, but yet he had no power to move : and where could he turn ? for come what may, he must have tidings of that one who was all that earth had of precious to him.

Ten o'clock struck ; the little time-piece rang out its merry chime,—to him it had the sound of a death-knell : and then slowly across the hall a step was heard approaching. He heeded it not at first, but it drew nearer and nearer. A hand was on the door. Who would come ? — her father ? — what tidings ? Thoughts of agony flashed across his brain. The door opened : Mr. Montrevor, his head bent, his eyes hollow and sunken, and his lips firmly closed, stood before him, at first unconscious of Gerard's presence, and starting when he became aware of it, as he would if a serpent had crossed his path. His thoughts were those of bitterness, but the words, "Speak kindly to him," were on him as a spell ; and when he looked upon the face that was turned upwards to him in such speechless misery, seeking the answer to the question there was no power to utter, the bitter thoughts changed and melted, and passed away.

"She lives," he said : the night's watching had been such agony to him, so little used to sickness, that he had dreaded that each hour would be the last ; and that she lived still was more than he had dared to hope. He did not feel as if he had power to say more,

and was turning to leave the room, forgetful of what had brought him there, when Gerard roused himself to say, "May I speak with you?"

Both felt that *here* they could not speak, and Mr. Montrevor went, and Gerard followed him, to the library. Mr. Montrevor sat down, and motioned to Gerard to do the same, but he stood, leaning against the book-case for support; he tried to collect his thoughts to remember what he had wished to say, but after some moments' fruitless efforts, no words would come but, "Is there no hope?"

Mr. Montrevor felt none himself, but he could not put his dreadful fear into words, and he answered, "She was rather calmer when I left the room: there has been violent delirium all night; the fever has attacked the brain."

Gerard did not speak at once: to hear that all hope was over could hardly have plunged him in deeper misery. At length he asked, in a hollow tone, "You know all?—am I to go for ever?" He grasped the back of a chair for support as he bent forward, his eyes wildly open, to listen for Mr. Montrevor's answer.

He paused ere he gave it, and then said, while his voice trembled, "Her last conscious words were that she must never see you again; she said she was very sorry she had made you so unhappy, but she could never trust herself to see you: she could hardly speak; words seemed to fail her."

Gerard groaned aloud: "It is more than I can bear—more than I have deserved," he uttered fiercely.

"That God and your own conscience alone can tell," Mr. Montrevor answered, solemnly; "but it is

an awful thing, for the sake of a passing gratification or amusement to one's self, to have hopelessly wrecked the peace of another's life,—to have crushed all the joy and hopes of a young, trusting heart,—to have, perhaps, brought one in the prime of life to the grave. I speak not of my child—I know you were true to her; and I did not mean to reproach you—you have enough to bear. We must part now—part for ever.”

“Let me say one word before you go,” Gerard ejaculated, in a choked, hoarse tone: “I am not altogether the heartless wretch you think me.”

Mr. Montrevor would have assured him that he judged not thus, but Gerard left no time for him to speak, but continued, hurriedly, “Long ago I loved her,” (he could not name her name,) “or rather I would have loved her, but that I thought she loved another; and I went away, determined to forget what I persuaded myself was a mere fancy. I went to Italy, and there I met this unhappy girl who has been the cause of all my misery. To amuse myself, I suppose, I sought her, and circumstances favoured our intercourse. Her musical talents interested me: I cared little for society, but found pleasure in that of one who had intellect, and a nature impassioned as my own; and before I had arrived in England I had persuaded myself that I was desperately in love with her. I believed it then, and made her believe it too,—and perhaps had believed it still, had I not met your daughter again.” He paused for a moment, strongly agitated, and then continued, “I forgot all, and knew *then* what love was.” He ceased speaking, and buried his face in his hands.

"Gerard," Mr. Montrevor said gravely, but kindly, "you are deceiving yourself: you forget that no intensity of feeling can justify the departure from the principles of right and wrong. Your vows were made to another; how could you, except with that other's consent, retract them, and give them elsewhere?"

"I did so because I was carried away, and could not stop to consider where I should end."

"Is not that the cause of all that is sinful in the world?—the following our own inclinations instead of the path of duty?"

There was a pause for some moments, and then Gerard said, raising his head suddenly, "But it cannot be that I must leave her for ever! She will not give me up!" The last words were spoken in an almost imploring tone.

"God only knows whether she will ever speak again," was Mr. Montrevor's answer: "I feel that I must act now on her last conscious words. Should she express a wish to see you, you shall be told, but I cannot deceive you by saying I think it will be so."

A bell rang quickly as he spoke; he knew it was from his child's room, and started up to go to her, but Gerard's expression of agony recalled him. "You shall hear how she is: tell me where I can write to you. Stay here if you wish it, there may be a change before night; but forgive me if I send you a written report. This interview has been inexpressibly painful to me; it were better for us both that there should be no repetition of it."

Gerard looked at Mr. Montrevor with an almost

vacant expression, and then said, "Yes, stay—stay one night more under the same roof. Oh for opium to dull this agony!"

Mr. Montrevor moved towards him again, and said, "Lie down here; you have been up all night, lie down: sleep will perhaps be sent to you; it often comes after great mental anguish." He took Gerard by the arm, drew him to the sofa, and left him there. Grief seemed almost to have exhausted the strong man.

How the long hours of that weary day ever passed none in that house could have told. To Aunt Mabel they were almost one uninterrupted prayer; and the poor father's heart poured forth, amid its misery, many earnest petitions.

But night came at last: it brought no rest to that poor stricken child,—it brought no peace to the wild wanderings of the brain, to the ceaseless motion of the burning head, to the restless glances of the eyes, that seemed ever seeking something they found not. And the doctor, when he paid his hourly visits to the room, could not cheer the anxious hearts of the mourners. More than one report was sent down to Gerard;—he never moved from the library, where Mr. Montrevor left him. For some hours he did not change his posture on the sofa; he sank into a kind of stupor, from which he actually dreaded to arouse himself.

At night Aunt Mabel came down and persuaded him to go up to his own room and go to bed, promising him that a report should be sent to him in the morning. It seemed to her that a few hours more must put an end to all earthly care for their poor broken Lily.

But morning came, and yet she lingered here,—the spirit still linked to the suffering frame, and the mind now wandering to its blissful days, the voice speaking gentle, happy words. It was a relief to those who watched, even if it betokened no improvement.

Mr. Montrevor felt that it was useless for Gerard to remain; he must go sometime,—delaying his departure would not soften its bitterness. He could not see him again, but Aunt Mabel undertook to convey his last farewell with the morning report of Constance. Gerard hardly spoke, but before she left him he murmured a request that some one in charity would write to him—giving his address in London. And an hour afterwards he departed from that house, which only a few weeks since he had entered in such fulness of joy, and now left bereft of all.

What had caused this terrible change? Trace it to its source—self-indulgence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Then grudge not thou the anguish keen
Which makes thee like thy Lord,
And learn to quit with eye serene
Thy youth's ideal hoard.
Thy treasur'd hopes and raptures high—
Unmurmuring let them go."

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

CONSTANCE did not die, though for many days and nights it seemed to all who watched her, that death must come and end the struggle. But at last a change took place, and then by slow, slow degrees, the fever was subdued; the acute pain in the head abated, the wandering and delirium were less frequent, and her wasted face began to assume a more natural and less death-like expression.

As a lily whose blossom, bowed down by a storm, gradually revives and lifts its head, did this poor crushed one by degrees return to life.

But though there was a slight amendment, she still lay in a state of apparent indifference to all around,—in an apathy from which nothing could arouse her.

One evening, when her father was sitting by her bedside, her lips moved as if she wished to speak. He stood up, and bent over her to catch her words, but she turned her face away, as if the effort were too great, and he sat down again. After a few moments he once more noticed the tremulous motion of the

lips, and said softly to her, "Did you wish to say anything, my child?"

He caught the words, "Is he gone?"

His courage and strength almost failed him in giving the answer, but her eager eyes and quickly drawn breath warned him not to prolong the suspense, and he answered, "He is;—it was your desire."

She did not speak, but closed her eyes, and a look of agony passed over her face, while she seemed to gasp for breath. Mr. Montrevor thought she would have fainted, and rose up to ring the bell; she opened her eyes and shook her head to stop him, and after some minutes seemed to recover herself; but she lay quite still all the evening.

That night was a very anxious one; but when morning came, the eyes that had never wept were full of tears, and almost all day, and for many succeeding days, the tears flowed as if there were no power to restrain them. Her father was very uneasy, but the doctor hailed this as a good sign,—it was better than the state of apathy in which she had been for so long,—and he recommended, as a little change, that she should be moved from her bed to the sofa. So every evening she was carried to the sofa for a little time, and she began to raise her eyes, and look out of the window sometimes, and seemed more able to restrain her tears. She would often lie for hours together with her eyes closed, yet awake, and evidently in deep thought, her lips sometimes moving, but no words uttered.

One lovely, bright evening, she seemed stronger than usual. She had asked to have her sofa moved

to the window, and when the usual hour for being lifted into her bed came, had desired to remain longer. Her father had been out nearly the whole day on business,—a most unusual occurrence. She seemed anxious to see him, and asked often if he were come in; and when at last his step was heard in the hall, she begged Aunt Mabel to go and meet him, and ask him to come to her immediately.

One window in her room looked to the west; to this she had had her sofa moved, and there she now lay, her eyes turned towards the setting sun, her face pale as marble,—scarcely less white than the white cashmere morning-dress in which she was wrapped, her hands folded on her breast.

Her father came in softly through the door of the dressing-room, which was ajar, and, as he first caught a glimpse at her, stood transfixed. The rays of the sun, that played round her head, seemed to him like the glory depicted round the head of a glorified spirit, and he could with difficulty repress the sigh, almost groan, that longed to escape, as the thought arose how soon she might pass from his sight into the world unseen. The suppressed sigh did not escape her ear, and turning her eyes, she saw him. She was too weak to move, but a smile came over her face as she stretched forth her little thin white hand towards him. He kissed her again and again, as he murmured over her words of endearment and blessings; and then, sitting down, turned his face away, for he thought the change in her had never struck him as it did now.

It was but a few weeks before that she had stood

with him at that window, in perfect health and strength. And his mind instantly recurred to one evening when he had come into her room to speak to her before going down to dinner, and found her standing at that window, looking almost brilliant in her beauty—her long bright curls shading her face, a wreath of flowers in her hair, and her joyous, child-like expression blended with deep feeling, as she stood thinking of him to whom she had given her whole heart.

And now there she lay at the same window, her wan, colourless cheeks telling how near she had been to death; her hopes blighted, her visions of happiness marred, and that young heart crushed and broken. He looked at her once again, and then buried his face in the pillow, for the sight of the smile she tried to give him was too much for him.

She saw and felt his grief, and gently pressing his hand, she said, trying to steady her weak voice, "Dear papa, I am much better to-day."

"Are you, my precious child?" he said, and raised his eyes again.

"Yes, papa, much better; and I do not think I am going to die now."

A deep sigh from an over-full heart, and a long wistful glance into the wasted face, was all the answer he could give.

She paused a few moments, and then said, while her eyes filled with tears, "I am afraid I have been very wicked."

"Wicked, my child! you wicked!" her father said, almost reprovingly.

"Yes, papa," she continued hurriedly, "I have indeed: you must not tell me that I have not—I have been very wicked; but I will try to be better," she added, with touching, childlike simplicity. "Oh, how I have been repining, murmuring, longing to die, when I was all unfit for death!" She paused again, and then went on, almost in a whisper, "But I will not wish to die now. No, if it is God's blessed will that I should live, I will try to be glad; I want to be very different from what I have been. Our Heavenly Father has been teaching me great things in these hours of weakness. What a life I have been leading! a life for self, all unmindful of Him; and one sorrow has been enough to send all thoughts of Him and heaven from my mind; and I have longed to die, not that I might go to Him, and dwell with Him, but that I might get rid of this dull, crushing weight of misery. But I will try to do better,—I have been living for self, now I will, with God's help, live for Him."

Her father looked at her half wonderingly, and though fearing to excite her by continuing the conversation, could not repress the exclamation, "Living for self, my child! indeed I do not think it."

"Oh yes, papa, I have; it is so clear to me now in my thoughts, but I can hardly put it into words. If God had had the first place in my heart, all other affections would have been secondary in and *for* Him; but it has not been so,—I have loved so intensely, that it has almost eaten the love of God out of my soul. I feel it now, but I could not then, that it is never safe to love without seeking God's blessing on

the affection, without offering it to Him, to be sanctified, resigned, or held, as is most pleasing to Him.—How different all might have been, had it been so.”

She had spoken with great earnestness, forgetting her weakness,—indeed, not feeling it; but now two crimson spots on her cheeks, warned her father that she must rest, and, deeply as her words interested him, he would not answer, but by an earnest pressure of the hand, and murmured, “God bless, and help you, my child!”

He rose and rang the bell for her maid, and desiring to be called when she was ready to be moved, he went down to the large, deserted library, and, pacing up and down, mused over her words. Were they not enthusiastic—the working of an excited mind? No; he felt that in her heart they were “the words of truth and soberness.” The few simple sentences she had uttered awoke a new train of thoughts in his mind. What was all that the world calls goodness, liberality, energy, skill, genius, when not used directly for God’s glory? When used without that one sanctifying principle, though in themselves noble, great, and good, do they not become so many forms of self-pleasing, self-seeking? And, withdrawn from direct allegiance to Him from whom they spring, so much the more in that they are noble, great, and good, do they become a subtle form of rebellion. The angels, who were near to God in heaven, when they rebelled, fell hopelessly. The noble, gifted ones of earth, when they use the great gifts entrusted them to shew forth their Master’s glory, for a lower aim, are they not in a fearful state of peril?

He sat down and covered his eyes with his hand, as these thoughts thronged into his mind, and his whole life seemed to pass before him in a moment. What was there that he could lay hold of and say, "That was an offering to God, done for love of Him alone?" He started up again and paced the room, and He who reads all hearts heard the workings of that heart, as it rose from time to time in unuttered aspirations after light, and pardon.

A knock at the door roused him; Constance's maid came to summon him to her room. He waited a moment to calm his mind, and then followed her. Aunt Mabel was supporting the white form, and the bright spots on the cheeks were gone; he feared she was worse, but did not dare to ask. But as he lifted up the light burden and bent over her, she whispered very faintly, "I know I am better, dear Papa; don't mind if they say I am not."

Aunt Mabel looked anxious, and said nervously, as she saw Mr. Montrevor lingering by the bed, "I think Constance must not speak any more to-night."

She smiled and held out her hand, for she felt that Aunt Mabel was right; but she looked anxiously in her father's face, for it could not conceal from her the traces of deeply agitated thoughts. With an effort she drew from under her pillow a book, her Prayer-book; she opened quickly at the 130th Psalm, and said, pointing to it, "It is such comfort, Papa;" and then looking up again in his face, and smiling, she sank back, and with one kiss and pressure of the hand he left her.

He took the book, his finger in to mark the place;

and went back to the library, and again paced restlessly up and down. It seemed to him as if he were once more alone in the world. It was the sorrow of the time of her birth renewed. He knew not how he had clung to her till now that her life seemed waning. The heart swelled with agony; he could not pray, he could not think. But her book was in his hand; he opened it. "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice." "Out of the deep," that was it,—the deep of misery, the deep of despair, the deep of heart-agony. At first, almost mechanically, he repeated the words, "Out of the deep," again and again, and went no further; but, "have I called unto Thee, O Lord," followed, and then from the depths of the heart rose up the almost agonizing entreaty, "Lord, hear my voice." Light from heaven began to glimmer on the dark surface of that well of misery, and hope to cheer the heart. It was not only earthly hope, it was not the hope alone that the delight of his eyes might yet be spared to him; it was something higher than all this—it seemed to rise above it, to soar beyond all earthly desires. It was one of those gleams of heavenly joy, those foretastes of beatific delights, that are in mercy sent from time to time to lift up the drooping soul, and enable it to rise triumphant over its weight of grief and care. Such may not last,—would earth be earth any longer if they did?—but they do their work, they cheer and animate, and, for a moment at least, the immortal conquers mortality. The very knowledge that such joys do exist, and can visit the soul, enables it to take up again with renewed strength its burden of sadness and sorrow.

So it was with Mr. Montrevor, when, after some solitary hours of deep thought, alternating with dreamy vacancy, he went up to his own room.

The light that had cheered him at eventide failed not in the morning, and with a more hopeful tread he went to his child's room to hear the report of the night. It was a good one, and as her maid was giving it in a whisper at the door, Constance said, "Papa, I am awake; will you come in?"

He was quickly at her bed-side; and she gave him one of her bright smiles, so like old times, that he started, for it was almost like a returning from the dead: he had thought such looks had vanished for ever. He lavished on her those caresses and words of endearment which were hers alone, her own peculiar property, for on none but her were they ever bestowed, nor even on her in the presence of a third person. He staid some minutes beside her, she speaking gentle, cheering words, and wondering at herself that she had so long forgotten to comfort him, as the lines of care on his face shewed her how much he had endured. He was afraid to stay, lest she should exhaust herself, and left her with a feeling that he almost trembled to admit, it was so like hope; and hope he had determined altogether to relinquish.

But it might now be again admitted, for day after day passed by, each marked by some slight improvement. A little more strength gained, the attempt to stand, the ability to listen to reading, and a quicker observation of what passed around, all shewed that the exhausted frame was beginning to regain its powers.

There were, of course, still many hours in the day

when the whole physical and mental frame seemed prostrated, but these she tried to conceal from her father, and earnestly did she struggle with herself to gain entire resignation. It was often a very hard struggle, and many times she felt tempted to sink into that gloomy despondency which pictures the future as all dark and joyless, and imagines that on it the sun can never shine. But earnest efforts are never made in vain, and daily did the temptation to indulge in such dark forebodings grow weaker. Earthly joys, it was true, might no longer be attained, but there were others more enduring that might yet be hers. There were many vacant mansions in her Heavenly Father's house, and in one of those she might find an abiding home.

She was now able to bear daily visits from her uncle, and to feel comforted and cheered by them. It was some days before she could bring herself to ask after Clara, though longing to hear of her. She had never made any allusion to the past, but in that one conversation with her father, and she hardly dared trust herself to do so. She felt as if she could keep herself calmer when the thoughts were shut up in her own heart, and only suffered to escape in prayer.

But one evening when her uncle had been sitting beside her, and was about to take his leave, the question was forced forth which, during the whole visit, she had been longing to ask. She turned so white as she spoke, that he felt quite anxious, and sat down again beside her. He had much to tell, yet he feared to speak at any length to her now; but when once the

effort was made, she could not let him leave her without hearing all.

Clara's bodily strength was sinking fast, but the inner being had gained a new power, and she could calmly look her sorrow in the face, and feel and own that it had been the greatest blessing to her. All earthly hopes and griefs were dead in her, now that she had cast herself in humble penitence at her Saviour's feet ;—all but the desire, if it might be, to see Constance once more on earth.

When first the truth broke upon her, that it was to his affianced bride that she had told the tale of her lover's faithlessness, and that on him whom she loved best on earth she had brought sorrow and misery, she was for days almost beside herself, and, weak as she was, entreated to be allowed to go at once to Constance, and implore her to forgive all,—not to let her be the means of bringing such wretchedness on Gerard. And then the thought of him, as the husband of another, would come over her, and throw her into such a paroxysm of agony, that her aunt thought it could end in nothing but brain-fever. But happily she did not now shut out him whose office it was to minister to the broken-hearted, and with prayer and soothing words, and gentle remonstrance, her pastor helped to calm her distracted mind.

When Constance lay hovering between life and death, it was in truth a hard matter to bid her be comforted, for she could not be persuaded that she had not been the cause of her danger ; but when Constance began to amend, she became calmer and more resigned.

The thought of Gerard's misery at times, indeed, quite overwhelmed her; but here, too, her pastor made her see that all was well, and might work for good as it was. She had been unconsciously the instrument used for his benefit. It was far better for him, better for Constance, better for all, that he should not go on prosperously, with such a sin, unrepented of, on his soul. The Rector taught her to turn all her pangs of sorrow for him into prayers, that he might yet taste true bliss, and accept with gratitude his past suffering. And so peace came at last to that tempest-tost and impassioned heart, and she felt how great was the mercy that called her to flee away and be at rest, to whom this earth afforded no sheltering spot,—how loving the Hand that was stretched out to receive her into the ark, who found here no rest for the sole of her foot!

All this, and much more, did her uncle tell Constance. She listened to him with intense attention, her face buried in her hands, only raising it from time to time to entreat him with looks, not words, to proceed, if he stopped, fearing to exhaust her. But at length he rose, feeling sure he ought not to excite her any more, and with one short prayer, and the benediction, he left her.

When he was gone, Constance lay still and motionless, closing her eyes, and recalling every word that she had heard. Her vivid imagination pictured to itself all that Clara had endured, and her heart ached for her. She resolved that she would make an effort, as soon as she could move at all, to go and see her.

Strange was the feeling with which she now regarded her, and strange the mutual sympathy between them. Each had unconsciously marred the happiness of the other, each was striving alone in solitary, unuttered suffering, to overcome an affection that had seemed almost stronger than life. This wish to see Clara gave Constance a desire to regain strength that she had not felt before: for though she strove hard to be resigned, she had but attained to that resignation which submits passively and uncomplainingly to the will of God; not to that which makes the will of God its own will, and loves it because it is the will of God. She was contented to live, but it was difficult to her to be thankful that life was preserved; though her heart told her there was much yet to be done ere she was prepared to resign it.

Now the hope of having strength to go and see Clara made her more willing to take nourishment, and anxious to attempt to move a little about her room. Her father's arm trembled almost as much as she did, the first time he supported her in her effort to walk a few steps. But each day the little walk was prolonged, till at last the doctor acceded to her request, that she might be allowed to go out of doors. Her father carried her down-stairs, and a drive of a quarter of an hour in the easiest carriage was permitted. The drive was to be repeated for some days, each day increasing in length, before she could be suffered to pay the longed-for visit.

Her uncle came daily to see her, and brought her reports of Clara, and promised, when the day was fixed, to prepare her for the visit. Clara never left

her room now, and was daily getting weaker, but her one wish still was to live to see Constance once more.

At length the day arrived: it was a mild, soft November morning, the woods were still tinged with the rich autumnal tints, and the grey sky, with its streaks of light and cloud, seemed to cast a grave but soothing hue on all things. Constance was very pale, and did not speak as they drove to Mrs. Lester's house: her father went with her. Oh, how much did that house recall, and how immeasurable seemed the change that had come over her since last she looked on it! she felt as if years must have passed over her head.

Mrs. Lester met them at the door, and could with difficulty restrain a burst of tears, as she saw Mr. Montrevor, helping, almost lifting, his child's slight, trembling figure from the carriage. They staid in the little drawing-room, whilst Mrs. Lester went up to tell Clara of Constance's arrival. She returned soon, went to Constance and said, "Can you go up at once? she is very anxious you should come immediately; the excitement of suspense is too much for her. I will take you to her door, but I must not go in with you: you alone are to go in, she begged. But oh, my dear child, it is too much for you. Shall you ever get through it?" she asked anxiously, as she noticed Constance's quivering lips.

Constance answered, without raising her eyes, "Oh, yes, I am quite ready; let me go at once."

Her father put his arm round her to support her up the stairs, and Mrs. Lester took them to the door.

Constance waited a moment with her hand on the handle of the door to take one long breath, and then opened it and entered.

Clara lay, worn and wasted, supported by pillows, on the bed. Her hands were clasped, her eyes had been closed, but at the first sound of the handle they were opened and fixed on the door. As Constance came in, she made an effort to raise herself, and stretched forth her hands, but sank back again, and closed her eyes, murmuring sounds that were quite inarticulate. Constance was at her side in a moment, and hung over her kissing her white forehead again and again, but herself utterly unable to speak. She could not stand, and sinking down on the chair that had been placed for her by the bed-side, she held Clara's hand, and buried her face in the bed. It was some minutes before either could speak, and the first words came from Clara: in a husky, tremulous voice, she whispered, "Can you forgive me?"

It was the very sentence Constance's throbbing heart would not let her utter; but now words came, and eagerly, as she pressed Clara's hand, she answered, "Oh, dear, dear Clara, how I have longed to ask your forgiveness! But oh, I knew not the evil I had done you."

"It was not you, *cara amica*; you have nothing to blame yourself for: but ah, how I have pierced your heart! how little I knew, as I eased my broken heart by telling you of its sorrows, that I was sending a poisoned arrow into yours."

"No, dearest Clara, we knew not the misery we caused each other, and that has been one comfort.

But oh, how guilty I have felt in having robbed you of your treasure."

"You did it not; think not of it. I need not that love now; I can thank God that it was wrenched from me. It bound me down to earth, it left no room for any other love. But now—it seems too great happiness—I have that joy, that peace which no earthly sorrow can assail, that joy which the good sister spoke of, that peace which He gives to all who labour and are heavy laden, when they throw themselves wholly on His mercy. No,"—and as she spoke she turned her eyes solemnly on Constance,—"No; could it now be offered me to have all *that* love given back to me, that love which I once told you was dearer to me than life, I would not have it; I would not trust myself with it again, lest it should rob me of that blessed love whose joys as far exceed human love, as heavenly bliss does earthly." She stopped, and closed her eyes while she pressed Constance's hand.

Constance could not answer, and after a few moments' pause, Clara spoke again: "You have found it too, *dolce amica*, have you not? you have found that blessed peace? Oh, how it has comforted me, when my heart ached to bursting at the thought of the misery I had caused you, to think that the joy which fills the soul when holy love visits it, leaves no room for sorrow. Ah, earthly love has ever its bitterness, its fears, its restlessness; but they know no place in that other love,—all is rest and peace there. I have had a stormy voyage, tossed erewhile on the waves of passionate emotions, lifted up to heaven

with wild joy, cast down to hell with deep despair; but all is past now—the calm light of evening shines on the still and peaceful haven; I have but to cast the anchor of hope, and lie still and wait for the morning of eternity. Wonderful! that I, the last, the lowest of all, should find an entrance into those mansions of joy; yet, through His wondrous mercy who bore with me in all my wanderings, I feel it may be so. Dear friend, tell me, is it so with you too?”

“I trust it will be, Clara; I have had foretastes of it. But oh, the earthly love is so clinging.”

“Ah, my lot is so much easier; I have nothing to do but to die, and you have life, perhaps a long, weary life, before you: yet I may not say that,” she added, checking herself, “it will not be weary if His arm upholds you, nor lonely if He walks with you.”

“But, Clara—I hope I am not wrong in asking, I hope I shall not disturb your peace—does no thought of him ever come over you, and darken your joy? of him alone and miserable?”

“It did,—it haunted me night and day; but not since I have been taught to turn all such thoughts to prayer. It has been one of the things I longed most to ask you, to let us agree together to offer, as long as life lasts, unceasing prayers to our Heavenly Father for him, that he too should find rest and peace. I do not think I shall be able long to offer them here, but shall we not still meet together in prayer when death shall have come between and cut off visible communion? and can prayer be less availing then? My friend, something tells me our prayers will be

answered. You perhaps may live to see that gracious answer. I too may see it, or in mercy it may be made known to me. And through that wondrous love, we may all meet and rejoice in that land where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, where love is safe, because the love of God so fills the soul, that all besides is loved in and for Him. There is no selfishness in love."

Constance bowed her head on the bed as Clara spoke, and prayed that she might attain to that state of mind. But Clara was right; it was far easier to gain it when the blessed rest of heaven seemed so near, than when the heart had to turn back to the dreary wilderness of earth. But He who gave to each heart its burden of grief to bear for Him, knew best what each needed, and had strength to endure.

They talked on long and earnestly. If Constance expressed a fear that Clara would be worn out, she assured her that she was not fatigued, and felt stronger than she had for months,—which was true, for the mind mastered the body's weakness, and neither of the two were conscious then of weakness and exhaustion.

At last Mrs. Lester's anxiety would allow her to leave them no longer together, and coming to the door, she knocked gently, and asked for admission. It needed but to glance at Clara's burning cheeks, and the unnatural brightness of her eyes, to assure her that her fears were not unfounded.

They knew that her arrival was the signal that they must part. "Yes, in one minute, dear Aunt," Clara

answered, before Mrs. Lester had stated for what purpose she came.

"It really must not be more. I fear you will both suffer from this. I will wait outside for you," she said, turning to Constance as she left the room, looking at them both with the tears in her eyes.

"One prayer,—let us have one prayer together for *him* before we part," Clara answered. Constance was too weak to kneel, but she bowed her head in assent, and buried it in Clara's pillow, while the latter murmured forth in earnest, imploring tones, a prayer that God would never leave him nor forsake him, but would bring him at last to His home of peace. Constance's heart added a petition that his suffering might be alleviated; but to Clara time seemed now so short, that it mattered not much how it passed, so only the haven were reached at last. After some moments' silent pause, both heads were raised, and with a fond and fervent kiss they parted.

Mr. Montrevor had gone away when Constance went up-stairs, but had now returned, and, like Mrs. Lester, was getting very anxious for the visit to be over. At the opening of the door he came up-stairs to help Constance down, and in a few minutes she was in the carriage, and driving home again.

That was an anxious evening for him,—he feared so much the excitement would have a bad effect; but though Constance was of course much exhausted, and was obliged to lie perfectly quiet the whole evening, with her eyes closed, and the room nearly dark, to still the throbbing of her head, she had a refreshing night's rest, and awoke apparently better in the morning.

It was not so with Clara. She had no reserve of strength to make up for what she had expended, and the next day found her more thoroughly prostrated than she had been for some weeks. She could not speak, she could not move, she could only lie still and endure, and from time to time breathe in her heart a prayer. The day was long and weary, but what was that to her? it was well she should pass through the purifying fire; and she cheered her heart with the thought of the rest in store for her.

Two or three days passed before, much as she wished it, she was able to see Constance again; and when they did meet, she was too weak to do more than hold Constance's hand, and murmur some gentle, affectionate words, ask for the one prayer together, assure Constance of her happiness, and earnestly hope she too had found it, and then lie still with closed eyes, but a smile on the lips.

Yes, death was coming fast to take the wanderer home. Constance saw and felt deep within her heart his steady, stealthy, onward step, and sometimes could hardly restrain the desire that he might come for her too; but she tried to check it, and to be glad that Clara should go, and she should be left, though a strong link to the past would snap asunder when she saw that face no more;—a link that bound her to a mournful past, it might be, and yet a past it was a bitter trial to give up from memory's treasure-house. When alone, she forbade herself to recall it, and none but He who seeth in secret knew the self-denial which that effort cost: but when with Clara, in some ways it could not be kept from returning, and strange as it

may seem, it is true, that to allow that past, so sweet, yet so full of sorrow, to return to the thoughts in any way, was a luxury. Before she had imposed this stern law on herself, her only comfort (though perhaps *that* it will hardly be called) was to be left alone, and give herself up to the indulgence of recalling every hour, and dwelling on every scene and every conversation, of those months of happiness.

She felt like one who had dwelt beside a volcano, and knew not that the flames would burst forth and consume her lovely home. And now, when the first shock was over, and she stopped to look around, and try to discover some traces of that which had seemed so full and perfect in its beauty and joy, to seek some spot where she might yet dwell in safety beneath the shadow of the ruins, she could find none; all had been swept away. To remain even in its neighbourhood was dangerous. It, with all its loved associations, its sweet memories, must be abandoned; the heart must seek for itself a fresh abiding-place: and where should that be found?

Her daily visits to Clara seemed now the occupation of her life. One day when she had sat longer than usual beside her, Clara made an earnest request that she would return the next day, and share with her in the blessing of Holy Communion. Both felt, though neither expressed their conviction, that this would be Clara's last earthly communion; and Constance looked on her almost with awe, as she thought how soon she would see behind the veil, and her soul behold the King in His beauty. She longed to ask her to bear a message of love to her own sweet mother,

whose gentle care she seemed to yearn after now—to tell her she had begun to enter on the narrow, rugged path, and would strive to keep in it to the end. Yet she feared to speak in any way that might excite Clara. But while the thought was in her heart, Clara said in a faint whisper, “My mother has been so much in my thoughts to-day, and I have been thinking of the joy it must be to her, if the departed are allowed to perceive what passes here, to know that her poor, sinful child’s earthly pilgrimage is nearly ended, and that, through God’s mercy, she may join soon. I have hardly dared to think much of her before, lest the joy of meeting her should have in any way hindered the heart from thirsting and panting after that which makes the bliss of paradise,—the vision of Him who died for us,” she whispered in a solemn, awe-struck tone. “And do you think that I shall know your dear mother, too, then?” she asked. “Oh, how she would rejoice to hear of her child.”

“I cannot tell, Clara; I have almost feared to be presumptuous in thinking of it; but I have so longed to ask you, if I may, and if there any memories of earth remain, to tell her that her child loves her so earnestly, and hopes to be strengthened to struggle on to the end, and to meet her in paradise.”

“I will, I will, if I may. Oh, how strange and fleeting this life appears to me now! words cannot tell how short it all seems,—a feverish dream, and death the awakening. And yet it seemed so long, so real in its misery, when passing; but death uplifts the veil, and makes us see things of earth as they

really are, without the colouring our poor hearts cast over them!"

Clara paused exhausted. Nothing could have interested Constance more than to hear her speak thus, but she knew each word told on her little remaining strength; she forbade herself continuing the conversation, and leant back in her chair, half shutting her eyes, as if she too were very weary. She could not have pursued a better course; Clara spoke no more, and Mrs. Lester soon coming in, Constance took her leave, and drove home.

There was a more hushed and subdued tone than usual, the next day when Constance reached the house. Mrs. Lester met her at the door; she looked pale and agitated, and there were traces of tears on her face.

"How is she?" Constance asked, while she looked at her anxiously.

"Very, very ill. She had a wretched night; I hardly thought she would live till morning. She laboured for breath till I feared each moment must end the struggle, but towards morning she fell asleep, and has awoke a little revived. But it is impossible that she can last much longer. She was anxious for you to arrive, fearing lest one of the paroxysms on the breath should return. Your uncle is with her. If you are ready, we will go up at once."

They went up. There was a change on Clara's face that told Constance, though she had never watched his approach before, that Death was at hand.

She could not even move her hand to welcome her,

but she smiled—a smile that could never be forgotten; its joy seemed from another land.

The holy service commenced: of it we may not here speak:—

“I may not tell the rapture
Of a banquet so divine.”

When all was over, the worshippers still knelt on, as if they feared to break by a movement the unearthly peace of that hour. Clara was the first to move—she opened her eyes and fixed them on Mr. Montrevor; he moved towards her, and Mrs. Lester and Constance rose to leave the room. But before Constance had reached the door, her uncle beckoned to her to return; he whispered to her, “She wishes you to receive the blessing with her.” Constance knelt beside the bed, and Clara made a slight movement with her fingers, as if to grasp her hand. Constance pressed her hands within her own, and the blessing was pronounced upon them together; one hand laid on the head of each, they were together commended to God’s gracious mercy and protection. When Constance rose from her knees, Clara whispered to her, “I think I shall reach our home before night, and I shall remember you and him. God bless you, my own sweet friend—bless you for all your love and kindness to me; may He lead you ever on nearer and nearer to Himself.”

Constance could not speak, but she looked on Clara with that long, lingering, wistful glance with which we gaze on that which we feel is passing for ever from our sight, and left the room. She returned

home immediately, much exhausted, and went to her own room, which she did not leave again that day.

She was lying alone in the quiet evening; the sun, though it was in November, was sinking gloriously to rest: all was still, when suddenly on the stillness uprose the solemn sound of the passing-bell.

Constance's whole frame quivered at the first sound; she covered her face with her hands. She did not weep; and ere many moments had passed, she could raise her eyes calmly to the heaven above, and bless God that the wanderer had reached her home.

CHAPTER XIX.

"The life-long sorrow that remained became
A healing and a chastening grief."

SOUTHEY.

THE Rector called the next morning to see Constance. He sat with her a long time, and told her how calm and peaceful had been Clara's departure. She had lain still the whole day, with her eyes closed, the same look of happiness on her face, but without speaking till towards evening, when she opened her eyes and murmured, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise," and a few moments after had breathed her last, with her Saviour's Name on her lips.

Constance could only lie still and think when he had left her, trying to realize Clara's joy. At evening-time the next day, which was Sunday, Mrs. Lester came to see her. Constance asked, in whispered tones, which day was fixed on for the funeral.

Thursday, Mrs. Lester told her.

"Which day of the month will that be?" she asked.

"This is the 16th, then it will be the 20th," was the answer.

Constance's cheek turned pale.

"You are tired, my dear; I have staid with you too long; I have been very thoughtless," Mrs. Lester said nervously, as she looked at her.

"No, indeed you have not tired me. You will let me know the hour? I shall hope to be able to be in church."

"But it will be too much for you, indeed it will; you must not think of it: it will do you harm."

"I think not; I should like to try," Constance answered; and then feeling she must be alone, she wished Mrs. Lester kindly good evening.

When the door was closed and she was alone she murmured, "The 20th, the 20th: it is well."

The 20th of November had many associations. It was Gerard's birthday; it was the day he had often, of late, urged Constance to fix as their wedding-day. It was well. It would be in truth a fitting time to let all past earthly hopes and joys be for ever buried in the grave, and to strive to arise to a new and holier future.

The day came. The mourners had felt that the stillness of eve would be more in unison with their feelings than the brightness of morning; and at four o'clock Constance sat calm, but feeling great bodily weakness, alone in the church.

We cannot describe what her feelings were at that hour—what solemn thoughts were with her, what intense aspirations arose to the throne of grace. The holy service seemed to fall on her ear as a voice from heaven.

The next day Constance resolved that she would go down-stairs, and join her father in the library for an hour or two in the evening. It was a great effort to return in any way to former things; there had been of late a peace and rest in the solitude of her own

chamber that she seemed almost to fear to break by taking part again in the routine of daily life. But if it were her duty, it must be done,—strength would be given,—she must try to forget herself. So day by day, often with a weary, aching heart, she tried to occupy herself. She was not able to do much, but she could lie on the sofa beside her father, and strive to interest herself in what interested him.

Gerard's name never passed her lips, and her father feared to allude to him in any way; but yet he longed to know whether her former determination was unalterably fixed. From time to time Gerard had written imploring letters, entreating to know how Constance was—whether there was no hope of her relenting; and Mr. Montrevor felt, that should intelligence of Clara's death reach him, perhaps hope would revive in his heart, and it would be kinder and better to let him know the truth. So one evening in the twilight, as he sat in the library beside Constance's sofa, before candles were brought in, he resolved to turn once more to the subject. They had been silent for some minutes—he had been trying to summon resolution to speak, while Constance lay still, deep in thought. Presently her father took her hand, and her face was turned towards him. He spoke with an effort: "I want to ask you a question, my child; I trust it will not pain you."

He paused for her answer.—She felt what subject he must be approaching, and could not speak; but she tried to look calm, and by a sign asked him to proceed. He hardly knew in what words to put his question, but said at length, "Nothing that has occurred has in

any way made you alter the decision you formed some weeks since?" He felt that she would understand him, and he could not say more.

She did understand him, but it was very difficult to her to speak; once or twice the lips moved before the words could be articulated, but they came at last: "No, papa, I could not change. Was it a wrong decision?" she asked tremblingly.

"No, my child; it is the one I should have expected your heart to make."

She summoned strength to speak, and continued, "It was such a dreadful shock; I had believed him to be so noble, so good; I had thought he would have led me on: but afterwards all seemed shaken. And I do not feel that I should be justified in promising to be his;" it was with a great effort that this was said; "and if I could not give all the love, and honour, and reverence, unclouded and undimmed, which I once gave, I feel that, for him and myself, it was better that I acted as I did. It is all over now; I have lived my life, papa."

"But, my child, you are so young: you must not think that all the joy of life is gone. This will pass away with time, and new joys will open out before you."

She smiled faintly, and said, "Yes, papa, I think they will; but they will not be joys of earth. I trust I shall never be sad or gloomy, but life can never be again to me what it has been. I think in time I shall be quite happy; but if I am, it must be a happiness that is not dependent on earthly hopes."

The servant came in with lights at that moment,

and the conversation was not resumed. But the next morning Mr. Montrevor wrote to Gerard, telling him that he felt he should only be doing him a kindness in letting him know how vain it was to cherish any hope of a change in Constance; and adding, that it would be better that all correspondence for the future should cease between himself and Gerard.

Eustace had not yet left England, though his arrangements were nearly completed. A college friend of his father's was now a colonial bishop, and greatly in need of help in his new diocese; and to him Eustace had determined to go, and to wait for ordination till he entered on the scene of his labours. The news of his intended departure had been a great sorrow to Harry Sedgeleigh, who looked upon him as almost his only friend. He longed to leave England, which had been the scene of so much trial to him, and accompany Eustace; and Eustace, finding that he would be thankful to get any appointment which would afford him a certain income, used every exertion to procure him one in the colony to which he was going; and through Lord Rockwood's interest a secretaryship was procured. The two friends were to sail together soon after Christmas.

Aunt Mabel and his father had written Eustace constant accounts of all that had happened at Elvanlees. It would be needless, if it were possible, to describe all that passed through his mind when he heard the history of Constance's sorrow and illness. It was some time before he could feel any pity for Gerard, though *he* could so well imagine what his misery must be. But sorrow and indignation that Constance

should have been made to suffer left at first no room for any other feeling. There were moments when tempting thoughts would arise in his mind, but he was inured to the task of overcoming them : and he kept one thing ever clearly before his mind,—that he had resolved on devoting himself to the work for which he was preparing, and it would be faithless to hesitate. He had put his hand to the plough ; there must be no looking back. Besides, he forced himself to see how delusive were the phantoms that tried to force an entrance into his heart. If Constance had not loved him before, would she not be less likely than ever to think of love now, when her heart was pierced and torn with such a wound ? So he stilled all restless thoughts, looking on them as a part of the discipline which his heart had to endure ere it was purified and fit for his Master's service.

He had determined to return home for the last week of his stay in England ; and Percy hoped to get a fortnight's leave and meet him.

Harry Sedgeleigh had felt uneasy at leaving his mother and sister in such a lonely situation ; Constance, too, had expressed a wish that Ada could be nearer Elvanlees ; and this had led to Mr. Montrevor's putting into repair a small house which had been for some time uninhabited, about three miles from Elvanlees, and offering it to Harry for his mother and sister. Eustace had some trouble to prevail upon Harry to accept this offer, and found that he would do so with much greater comfort if allowed to pay rent for it. Mr. Montrevor respected the feeling of independence, and he consulted with Eustace how small a rent he

might put on it without making Harry feel he was under any obligation ; and these preliminary matters being settled, Mrs. Sedgeleigh and Ada, to the great satisfaction of the latter, returned once more to the neighbourhood of Elvanlees.

Again there were signs of preparation for a return at the Rectory ; and when Aunt Mabel paid Constance her morning visit, she tried to talk cheerfully of "the two boys coming home from school." But her forced gaiety gave her a heavy heart on her homeward walk, as she recalled the merry steps with which Constance used to come dancing into her sitting-room as a child, in the days when Eustace and Percy really came home from school.

Constance did not seem to make much progress towards recovery ; she was still quite unable to take any exercise : indeed, if she moved more than usual about the room, she was obliged to take refuge on the sofa with trembling limbs and a beating heart. She had not yet summoned resolution to enter the morning-room, so associated now in her mind with her happy days with Gerard. Her dressing-room had been arranged as a sitting-room ; and here she passed her mornings, her father often with her ; and she joined him in the library in the evening. The effort of employing herself, and taking interest in what was passing, was greater than she ever acknowledged.

She was vexed with herself this morning at finding that she had to reason with and reprove herself before she could feel any pleasure in the prospect of Eustace and Percy's return. The first natural impulse was to think it would be a trouble to be obliged to see or

speak to anyone; but she went on with her lesson of self-discipline, and tried to overcome this as a morbid feeling: and when, on the following day, her father came in to tell her that her cousins were in the library, and to ask whether she felt equal to seeing them, she at once agreed to do so.

She had little idea how much the change in herself shocked them, and how difficult it was to them to speak calmly when they looked on her white, sunken cheeks, and felt the touch of her little, thin, burning hand, that was stretched out to greet them. Perhaps the change was the more striking from the bright curls being all gone, and the hair smoothly parted and drawn off from the face. But certainly Percy felt a choking sensation in the throat, which made it very difficult to him to speak to her ; and he was altogether unable to return Woolly's enthusiastic welcoming.

Eustace, after the first few moments, sat down beside his uncle, at the further end of the room, and turned his head so as not to look on that pale face. Percy sat by Constance, but was almost afraid to talk to her, lest he should unconsciously say anything that might awaken thoughts of the past. He was quite grateful to little Woolly for furnishing a subject of conversation.

When the visit was over, the two brothers walked together in silence for some minutes; then Percy burst forth, "I can't endure the thought of that man, Clifford, or Aubrey, or whatever his name is; I think he is a regular hypocrite, a miserable impostor, a ——"

But Eustace stopped the torrent of words, "No, no, Percy, not all that; that's going too far."

"Well, what on earth would you call him? When I look at Lily, so changed, so wasted, I can hardly think of anything too bad for him."

An expression of pain passed over Eustace's face, but he spoke in his natural voice:—"I do not call him an impostor or a hypocrite. He was what any of us may be any day,—a man who is led by impulse instead of principle; who passes through life with no ulterior aim than his own gratification."

"Your definitions are too subtle for me," Percy answered, in an irritable tone; "I cannot follow them. Do you mean to say that he did not know he had no right to come and make love to our beautiful Lily?"

"I have little doubt but that, now the shock has opened Gerard's eyes, he is as much amazed at the course he has pursued as we are. He was always accustomed to do just as he liked—to go where he chose, and to follow his own inclinations, without laying any restraint upon himself; was it likely that he should do otherwise when under the influence of such a temptation? That was not the time to pull against the stream of long habit, but to float down with it."

"Then, my good fellow, I suppose you mean to exonerate him from all blame, and to exalt him into a hero again."

"No, Percy, that day has passed; I only shrink from condemning him. He did not know where the stream of self-indulgence would carry him; nor do we, when we ship our oars, and let its smooth and rapid current carry us on."

Percy made no answer, and they walked for some little time in silence; then Eustace said, "This has

made me feel more than ever thankful that I am to be an idle man no longer. Any settled occupation, no matter what, I am convinced, is better than idleness."

"Breaking stones in the road, my good man?" Percy asked, in his own quaint way.

"Yes, certainly, that better than nothing," Eustace answered with a smile; and they reached the Rectory and went in.

Eustace said nothing of their visit, but Percy relieved himself by talking again to Aunt Mabel over his indignation at the change that had been wrought in Constance, and mourning over the blighting of all her hopes of happiness.

Aunt Mabel told him that she believed Constance was not so sad as might have been expected. She felt at first doubtful about touching on the subject that so consoled and sustained her; but Percy could listen to anything that related to Constance, and Aunt Mabel could see that there was no look of weariness on his face when she ceased speaking.

The next day, when Eustace was walking with his father, they called at the Hall: the Rector went up to see Constance, but Eustace remained in the library. On their walk home, the conversation naturally turned to her who was the object of love and anxiety to all. Eustace remarked, after saying how greatly the change in her had struck him, "I cannot understand it all. I should never have thought that Constance needed this fearful discipline of suffering; she seemed always so good, so gentle, and such a noble mind."

There was a pause before his father's answer came, and when he spoke it was in a low tone, rather as if

he were expressing his own thoughts than answering another's. His words were—" ' And Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest : '—yes, Constance's seemed a beautiful character,—gentle, clever, sweet-tempered ; but yet it was but natural goodness,—it would have been but a commonplace character, after all, and very probably would have deteriorated. But now she is called to be of the mystic number of those ' which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,' and I think she will answer to the call : it is all well. ' What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.' "

Neither spoke again ; but the words sank deep into Eustace's heart.

CHAPTER XX.

"Oh, there is never a sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of Him to be our Friend."

WORDSWORTH.

THE weeks wore away. Advent passed and Christmas came, and still in her weakness lay the young mourner. She strove continually for entire resignation,—but it was easier to keep an Advent heart of watching than a Christmas one of rejoicing.

Mrs. Sedgeleigh and Ada had moved from North Wales, and were settled in the house Mr. Montrevor had prepared for them. Ada had been many times to see Constance: their early conversations used to come often to her mind, as she sat beside her. Constance had no longer need to tremble at her lot of unclouded joy; the waves and storms had passed over her now, and she had come to that day in which the light is neither clear nor dark, but in patience and stillness she waited for the promised light at evening-time.

The time for Eustace and Harry Sedgeleigh's departure came,—they were to leave Elvanlees on the last day of the year. Constance had determined that after Christmas she would make a new effort, and take possession again of the long-deserted morning-room. And she did so, though there was a strange feeling upon her, as if she were entering a chamber where death had been, and had set its solemn seal.

She was there when Eustace came to take leave of her, lying on the sofa by the fire, trying to read. She was sorry to part with him, but she felt as if nothing could affect her much now, either for joy or grief: for his father and Aunt Mabel she could feel, but there was little personal feeling. He was almost to be envied, giving his youth and strength to God.

When he came in, he drew a chair and sat down beside her sofa. He was glad to see her once more settled in the room so connected with their early days. But as he looked round, it seemed to have lost much of its old, familiar look. It was scrupulously neat; the piano was closed,—no music was lying upon it; there were no drawing materials about; the books were all arranged in order on the table, as if they had been untouched for weeks. It was as if all these things belonged to a former period of her existence, and had no longer the power to interest. He had allowed half-an-hour for his visit: he had no fears for himself now in being with her; his love for her was a dream of the past. She remembered their last parting, and his warnings on not clinging too much to earthly happiness, and her tremor at his words—at the very suggestion that her happiness might pass. And now it was gone, and she was learning the lesson that must be learnt on earth, if ever we would hope for heaven: “My son, give ME thine heart.”

She was calm, quite calm, as Eustace sat beside her. She asked with interest about all the arrangements for his voyage, and told him that it would often cheer her to think of his life: “You have chosen the narrow

road," she said, humbly, "which I have been led into; but it will lead to the same end, will it not?"

She had never in any way alluded to herself or her own feelings before, and he was glad of this opening, as he could speak words of comfort to her,—not commonplace phrases of consolation, that seem to be said as a matter of course, but deep, earnest truths; truths of whose unfailing springs of comfort his own heart could bear witness; which had sustained him and every sorrowing child of earth, who turned to them in their need, through many an hour of grief, and would sustain all such till that hour when all tears shall be for ever wiped away.

Her speaking countenance told how his words fell like balm on her heart; and when the half-hour was over and he rose up to leave her, she asked softly, in tremulous tones, while the colour mounted to her pale cheek, and her eyes were averted, "You will pray for him?"

"I will," Eustace answered, in the solemn tone of one recording a promise—"I will, Lily. We will never forget these words: 'Ask, and it shall be given you.'"

After he had bidden her farewell, he lingered for a moment beside the sofa, looking calmly on her face; she saw him not, for her eyes were closed; and then with a firm but sad heart he turned away, and looked not back.

He left, and the year, with all its joys and its sorrows, was gone; another link to the past seemed severed.

The winter was long and dreary; there was a heavy fall of snow, followed by gloomy days of leaden skies and sunless hours. But what mattered it? the winter

frosts and cold must be endured, ere we can look on the bright flowers of spring; and in Constance's wintry heart there were many glimpses of the coming spring. A robin, driven by the severity of the season, sought refuge in her sitting-room, and spent the winter months there. He would perch on the end of her sofa, and look at her with his bright, clear eyes, and then warble forth his little cheerful song, as if he would speak to her drooping heart of the joy that may spring out of sorrow.

There was one subject in which she really began to take an interest, and that one the last in which she would have expected to be interested—Gainsworth and its inhabitants. Perhaps its very lack of pleasant associations was its charm now, for it was a rest to be able to turn the mind to any subject where it might stay without the danger of touching on forbidden ground. There had been a great deal of distress there, in consequence of one of the mills having stopped: the master had become bankrupt, and all his "hands" were without employment. It was only a temporary evil; but a fortnight's loss of work, and consequently of wages, to more than a hundred individuals, whose earnings supported two or three hundred more, was sufficient to cause immense immediate distress. To alleviate this in some degree, a subscription was set on foot, and a full account of the situation of the sufferers was forwarded to Mr. Montrevor. A correspondence was in consequence opened between him and one of the clergy, in the course of which the great want of church accommodation and of schools was pointed out.

Mr. Montrevor's mind was awakened in a degree it had not hitherto been, to the duties involved in the possession of property. He had always subscribed to the different charities of the place, and had given money liberally, when asked, for any desirable object; and then it had seemed to him that his duty was done. Now an entirely different view of the case presented itself; and he greatly startled his agent, who wrote to him on the subject of selling some land for building at a most advantageous price, by declining to do so, on the plea of requiring that land for building a church and school. To some, perhaps, his views might have appeared overstrained, but to him the fact of having been instrumental in bringing an immense number of people together, was now reason sufficient for binding him to take care that they were not left in a state of destitution in spiritual matters. And no sooner were his eyes opened to the want of another church and school in the district in which the manor-house stood, than he determined to provide both.

An architect was forthwith written to, and many winter evenings were passed by Constance and her father over the library fire, discussing plans for the improvement of Gainsworth. His lonely musings that night on which Constance had spoken to him when first beginning to recover, had left an impression that nothing could efface; and now did he truly

“ In life's commerce still the thought retain,
That men have souls, and wait a judgment-day.”

It gave a different tone to every word and action, though their colouring might still appear the same.

Mr. Montrevor and Constance did not enter into

society at all that winter. Her health was quite sufficient excuse for her remaining quietly at home; and her father would not leave her. There was such thankfulness in his heart at having her life preserved, that when he could persuade himself that she did not look out of spirits, he felt full of happiness; and Constance seldom looked out of spirits in his presence. Of course there were still seasons when her sorrow would seize upon her, and overcome all efforts at cheerfulness, or even composure, but these were becoming gradually of more rare occurrence.

Constance had looked for comfort where none ever looked in vain, and was learning practically the truth of the gracious promise, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He will sustain thee." Her loving, clinging heart knew now where to turn in all its agonies; and the sorrow that would have weighed her to the earth if brooded over, now poured itself forth in the earnest petition, "O knit my heart unto THEE." Yes, Constance was learning now, what all who would prepare for heaven must learn—that religion is not a name, not a series of acts to be performed, of duties to be done, but the breath of life in the soul,—breath that it is as great madness to imagine the soul can exist without, as it would be to suppose that the natural life could be preserved if deprived of air: it must pervade every thought, word, and action, change and hallow the source from whence they all spring, and leave on every hour an impress for eternity.

Constance was now able to ride occasionally on the old Shetland pony: she could not go beyond a footpace, so her excursions were not very lengthy. Her

favourite ride was to the Rectory; and when there, she would always walk into the churchyard, and look at Clara's grave. Her name and age, and the words, "He healeth those that are broken in heart," were inscribed on the stone; and Constance would recall their last conversation as she stood beside it, and feel there as if their prayers for *him* still went up as with one voice to the throne of God.

General Lessington was their only visitor this winter. It was touching to see the old man's tenderness and sympathy for the young girl. The tears started into his eyes when first he saw her, and marked the change that sorrow had made. The interview was trying to her too; it was impossible that it should not awaken many memories of the past. But after the first it seemed a mutual pleasure to them to be together. He liked nothing better than to sit beside her sofa, and he would often take up the books that were on the little table at her side, and read passages if she lay quiet and rested, and then look up tenderly at her gentle, calm face, and understand where her peace was sought.

He told Mr. Montrevor that Gerard had bought and fitted out a large yacht, and meant to leave England for years. He had stopped the improvements that had been begun on his property, and spoke as if he never meant to reside there. "Poor fellow! my heart ached for him when I saw him," he continued. "He was not worse than many others, Reginald; but I understood at once that it would be a death-blow to your child's happiness. How she loved him! Perhaps if the poor girl had not come here, she had not thought so much of it."

"I do not know. I believe that there is nothing that one noble-minded woman feels more deeply than a wrong done to another ; and I do not think under any circumstances she could ever have felt the same towards Gerard ;—I mean, not even if the bare facts alone had come to her knowledge. It is a subject on which she, I know, has always felt most strongly—the sinfulness of trifling with another's affections. And in truth, though it may be a common sin, I know few things more cruel than so to ruin the peace and happiness of another, simply to gratify one's own vanity or love of amusement. I daresay you think I speak strongly ; but if so, it is because I have had proof of the misery it causes. And who can imagine the unrecorded tales of anguish that trace their origin to that sin, which yet passes for a trifling fault."

"You are right, no doubt," General Lessington answered ; and then seeking to change the conversation, he continued—"I do not think that I ever told you that I saw Eustace and young Sedgeleigh after you did. I was staying with a friend in Hampshire at the time, and the very day they sailed we went down by train to Southampton, and I went on board with them. I thought it was a fine thing for the colony to have two such young fellows going out ; they seemed in their different ways both so full of energy. They were going to pick up knowledge of all sorts on their passage out. Eustace told me he meant to become a first-rate physician."

"I have a very high opinion of Eustace," Mr. Montrevor answered : "whatever he takes in hand he will accomplish ; there was always a simple determination to do what he knew to be right as a boy,

and of late I have noticed great strength of mind in him. He, at least, is not guided by impulse. But I see our horses at the door ; now, General, are you ready to set out ? I will just go and have one look at Constance."

He found her engaged with drawing materials, and the sight brought a smile of pleasure to his face, it was so like her former days. He came up to the table, and looked at her work.

"I am copying the plan for the new church at Gainsworth, Papa," she said, in answer to his look : "Uncle Edward said it would be a pleasure to Eustace to have it, so I am trying ; but my hand shakes so much, I am afraid I shall not succeed."

"Perhaps, dearest, by the time the church is finished you will feel equal to a journey, and we will go to Gainsworth for the consecration. If we can get an active, good man there, I hope much good may yet be done, though it is late to set about it. Gainsworth lies heavy on my heart, Lily ; I have sadly forgotten my responsibilities there."

She raised her face to kiss him ; and as he fondly stroked her hair, he said, "That is a true proverb, my child, 'Life is half spent before we know what it is ;' but, please God, the remaining years of my life shall be better spent than were the former ones."



PART III.

“WATCH, WITH FIRM, UNSHINKING EYE,
THY DARLING VISIONS AS THEY DIE,
TILL ALL BRIGHT HOPES AND HUES OF CLAY
HAVE FADED INTO TWILIGHT GRAY.”

Christian Year.



CHAPTER I.

"Thy will be done!
Beneath the dispensations of that will
I groan, but murmur not.
A day will come, when all things that are dark
Will be made clear;—then shall I know, O Lord,
Why in Thy mercy Thou hast stricken me;
Then see and understand what now
My heart believes and feels."

SOUTHEY.

RATHER more than three years after the events recorded in the preceding chapter, a vessel might have been seen preparing to weigh anchor in Kingston harbour, Jamaica. Amidst all the hurry and confusion observable in her decks, cuddy, and cabins, undisturbed by the groups of bewildered passengers, the piles of baggage, the noise of conflicting orders, two young men were engaged as quietly in conversation as if they had neither ears nor eyes to be disturbed by external sounds and objects. It was not till the last bell had rung, and peremptory orders were shouted out for all to clear off who meant to go ashore, that they parted. Their last few words were, "Well, good-bye, old fellow: a safe voyage to you, and a speedy return."

"I suppose I ought to echo that last sentiment," was the answer; "but the yellow fever has left unsatisfactory reminiscences of the climate."

"You will blow them away before you are across the Atlantic, and remember nothing but what was

agreeable. But by-the-bye, I was on the point of carrying off two letters that came for you this morning, and I am sure you will be glad of them to pass the time, till you feel called upon to preach to the fishes. And now in good earnest, Good-bye: let me have a line to say you have reached the good old country in safety; or, if that is too much trouble, put an advertisement in the 'Times.'"

These last words were said as the speaker was descending the ship's ladder; and as the boat rowed to shore he repeatedly waved his cap to his companion, and muttered to himself, "There goes the best fellow in the regiment; and heaven knows I shall be dull enough without him."

His companion, who looked weak and ill, watched the boat for some minutes, and then turned round to discover some spot where he might sit down and read his letters in peace; but the confusion on deck seemed rather on the increase than otherwise, and he went down into the cabin. It had as yet few occupants, and he drew out his letters; they were addressed to "Percy Montrevor, Esq.," and bore the familiar home post-marks.

Percy Montrevor gazed for a moment on his father's well-known handwriting, ere he opened the letter; but was soon entirely absorbed in its contents, which were as follows:—

"Elvanlees Rectory, April 20th.

"MY DEAR PERCY,

"You will believe with what thankfulness we received the doctor's report, that all danger for the

present was over, and that, through God's mercy, you had got through the worst of that fearful fever. And the news that you would have sick leave was an inexpressible relief, for indeed, to have you at home to nurse will be a great comfort.

"I wish I knew how to spare you the shock of the intelligence that I have to give, but I can but pray that you may not be in a state in which it will physically affect you. I could not write till I had a better account of you. Dear Percy, God's chastening hand has been upon us, and it has pleased Him in His inscrutable wisdom to make Constance an orphan indeed. Though six weeks have passed away, I can hardly yet believe the reality of all that has happened.

"Your uncle appeared in his usual health on Sunday, and was at church morning and evening. The next morning I had a note from Constance, saying that he seemed far from well, with a feverish cold, and she wished that I would call and add my persuasions to hers to prevent his attending a magistrates' meeting. I went to the Hall instantly; he smiled at our fears, told Constance she should nurse him all the evening, but that she must not ask him to stay at home now, as his presence was really of consequence. It was a cold, cutting March wind, and when he reached home again he confessed that he really felt ill, but would not hear of sending for the doctor. A restless night made Constance send for the doctor in the morning, without consulting her father. His anxious looks frightened her; she sent again for me. He told me that inflammation of the lungs had com-

menced, and that many of the symptoms made him uneasy. I immediately proposed sending for Dr. Walton, which he at once agreed to; but though I fully believe that all that man could do was done, all was of no avail. The inflammation was never subdued, and on the fifth day he sank under it. He was conscious to the last, and, thank God, able to meet death with perfect calmness. The parting with his child seemed the bitterness of death; but he was enabled to resign her into God's hands and feel no anxious fears. I can never tell you how she bore it all. She watched him night and day; I really believe she was never absent from his room five minutes at a time; what rest she did take was on a sofa at the foot of his bed. Her presence seemed his greatest earthly comfort, and her hand was almost always clasped in his, and all the words he did speak were whispered into her ear.

"You who know how the hearts of the father and child were knit together, can imagine what his loss is to her. For many days she seemed quite unable to realize it, and would sit for hours beside the bed, as if she were still watching him asleep; and it was only when Aunt Mabel or I asked her to come downstairs, under the pretence of wishing to speak to her, that she left the room. She attended the funeral, and for a week after it, at my earnest request, stayed with us at the Rectory, but at the end of that time she begged me to allow her to return home. I have seen her every day, and though she is always calm, I confess I cannot help feeling uneasy about her. She looks very ill; but at that, of course, one cannot

be surprised, after all she has gone through: it seems to me as if her whole frame, mental and physical, had received a shock from which there was not power to rally. If I come in unexpectedly, she looks wistfully round, and seems at first unable to rouse herself to understand what is passing. Her resignation is entire. I do not think, in her bitterest hours of sorrow, the thought has ever crossed her mind that could be construed into murmuring, or even wishing that things were otherwise than God has seen fit to ordain them. But the heart must feel, and certainly the joy of her young life has been strangely blighted. But you will understand me, I feel, if I say that I am faithless in speaking thus; I ought rather to remember, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.'

"I think, when I last wrote to you I told you of Mrs. Sedgeleigh's death, after a long but painless illness. Her daughter moved into Mrs. Lester's house, and is now with Constance: I hope much from her being there. They have always had a great affection for each other, and I trust may comfort one another now.

"I feel thankful, for so many reasons, that you are coming home, and I hope your return will be of use to dear Constance; for I think anything that would give a change to her thoughts would help her to regain strength.

"Aunt Mabel is pretty well; I see no signs of the advance of years. She is calm and cheerful as ever: and I feel sure that the nearer one draws to the end of one's pilgrimage, the less does death appear a separation. She is always expecting that her jour-

ney's end is at hand, and seems to think that each turning in the road must be the last, and that she will find herself in sight of home. And in truth, to recollect how soon, please God, we shall all be united in the land that knows no parting, is a cheering thought in these hours of sorrow.

"We had excellent accounts, by the last mail, of Eustace: his health is much stronger, and he seems working with all his heart; his work is intensely interesting to him. Harry Sedgeleigh is with him; they are quite kindred spirits. Poor fellow! you did him a good office when you hunted him out in his little lodgings in London.

"I shall look anxiously for the next mail, to let us know when we may expect you. May God give you a prosperous voyage home.

"Ever, dear Percy,

"Your affectionate father,

"EDWARD MONTREVOR.

"I forgot to mention that your uncle has left you and Eustace each £10,000. Elvanlees and Gainsworth were, as you know, entailed on Constance. But the —shire property is not entailed, and that is directed, by will, to be sold to pay off these legacies."

Some weeks after this letter was received, and about three months after his brother's death, the Rector received a note from Constance one morning, requesting him to call at the Hall as soon as he could conveniently do so. He laid aside his books and papers, and set off at once. It was a beautiful, bright

June morning,—one of those days in which everything looks so fresh and green; the young leaves on the trees and the opening blossoms so pure and unstained, that we feel inclined to doubt whether this is the same weary, work-a-day world that our eyes are accustomed to gaze upon.

Mr. Montrevor made use of his private key, entered through the flower-garden, and then ascended the steps that led to the terrace.

Constance sat, where we first saw her, in the morning-room; its windows were open, and through them we might have gazed in at the room, as before, and marked how unchanged was its appearance. But in the place of the merry, light-hearted girl who then stood there in such gaiety of heart, we should have seen, seated alone at a table covered with books and papers, a gentle, thoughtful woman, her black dress, with its heavy folds of crape, unrelieved by any particle of white, making the face and hands look like ivory in their paleness. Her expression was much changed; but though the childlike joyousness was gone, none could have called it gloomy or melancholy. There was a calm, subdued look, telling that grief had been the heart's visitor, but with it an indescribable peace and repose, that seemed to cast a softening, soothing light on all around.

The Rector stood for some moments without, looking tenderly, almost proudly, upon her, ere he entered. She had an open letter in her hand, which she had been reading, and over a portion of its contents she seemed pondering. It was in her uncle's writing, and was not a new letter, for it bore an April date;

it had been evidently much read. The passage she was dwelling upon was as follows :—"I cannot let you decide at once, my dear child ; your desire must be pondered over, prayed over. Both have been done, I have no doubt, and yet I must beg you to wait awhile before you form any plans for the future. Remember, we are told to count the cost ; and it is well that all our resolutions should be tested by the trial of waiting patiently. It is so easy, led on by a feeling of excitement, to leap over all the first obstacles that present themselves, and to make decisions that afterwards are regretted. All mere feelings will die away, and then what is left to support the soul which acted only under their influence ? It will sink into weariness and despondency, and consider that it made a rash and foolish choice. It is well to take calmly into consideration that very little of such a life as you propose is pleasant viewed by itself, and without reference to the one motive and principle that would sustain and cheer it. There will be weary days, disappointments, ingratitude, temptations to feel lonely and isolated, and to think one need not have given up so much. Now no excited feelings, no beautiful theory, will stand the test of these trials. Nothing but a calm, resolute purpose to labour solely for God's glory,—nothing but love for souls as redeemed by the Saviour's blood, can support and enable to persevere unto the end, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint."

The sound of her uncle's footsteps roused Constance ; she laid aside the letter, and moved towards the window through which he was entering,

to meet him, and raising her calm young face, smiled in welcome.

He took her hand, asked with much interest after her health, and answered her enquiries about Percy, who had now been at home some weeks; but he knew all the time that something was in her mind on which she wished to speak. After a few moments' pause Constance said, "You will not think me impatient, Uncle Edward, I hope, if I ask you to let me speak to you again on my plans for the future. It is two months to-day since I wrote to you.

He looked at her face, with its peculiarly subdued and chastened expression, and thought that it would be difficult to think that impatience was in her heart; and said, "Whatever interests you, my child, can never do otherwise than interest me. You must tell me again what your thoughts and wishes are."

"They are still what they were then, Uncle Edward: I wish to get your consent to my requesting Eustace to take possession of Elvanlees, and myself to remove to Gainsworth. I have thought over it deeply and calmly, and I am convinced for every reason it would be much better. A man is much more fitted than a woman to look after a large landed property. I should do no good here; I mean, the population is so small that there is so little to be done; while at Gainsworth, with God's blessing, I might be of use, where there are schools, hospitals, asylums for the aged, everything needed. And what can one poor woman do in a large house like this alone?" she added, with a sad smile.

"I know, Constance," her uncle said, with a slight

hesitation, "you will not like me to suggest that it does not necessarily follow that you will be always alone here; and yet I am sure it is right you should view the case in all its bearings."

"You mean," she said calmly, more as if she were speaking of another than of herself, "that I may marry; and of course I see clearly that that would quite alter the case: but it is an event which is hardly within the bounds of possibility, certainly not of probability. My mind has for long been so entirely made up on that point, that I must change utterly before such an event could occur. No, Uncle Edward, I really think you must allow that that is an objection answered and laid aside, and which need never rise up again." She looked at him appealingly.

He did not answer for some moments, and then said, "I would rather you had waited for a year before deciding anything."

"If you think it necessary," she answered sadly, "I will do so; but I must confess it will be a great disappointment to me to do it. You will not think it wrong, will you, if I go to Gainsworth for some months? because you know that the people here are well looked after, and what assistance they have from the house can be continued if I am not here; but at Gainsworth the distress in every way is really appalling."

"What makes you fix your heart upon it, Constance?" he asked, earnestly: "it used in former years to be a place of little interest to you."

"But not of late," she answered, while her eyelids drooped, and the colour mounted into her pale cheeks;

and she continued, in a low and somewhat tremulous tone, "it was one of the last things *he* said to me," and then paused.

Her uncle waited with intense interest for her to proceed, and asked, "Was it on the last night?"

"Yes," she answered, and her voice was calmer: "I was sitting beside him, and he opened his eyes; I saw he wished to speak, and bent over him: it was a great exertion to him, but he said quite distinctly, 'Do not forget Gainsworth, darling; I neglected it for many years, and now that I have known more of the depths of our Saviour's love, how bitterly do I repent that I have shewn so little love to Him;' he paused then for some moments, till he had gained breath, and then I heard him say, 'I was an hungred, and ye gave *Me* meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave *Me* drink; I was a stranger, and ye took *Me* in; naked, and ye clothed *Me*; I was sick, and ye visited *Me*; I was in prison, and ye came unto *Me*.' I can never forget the solemn tone of his voice, and the awe-struck expression of his face, as if he saw there how all that we do for others from love to our blessed Lord, is really done to Him."

For some moments neither spoke, and then Constance said, "You will not object to my going to Gainsworth now, Uncle Edward?"

"It would be impossible to do so. Have you made any plans in your own mind?"

"One reason why I particularly wished to speak to you this morning was, to ask your advice about the manor-house. The lease has just expired, and the late tenant, I know, does not wish to renew it, for

he was building a grand house when we were last at Gainsworth, which he means to inhabit; and I thought I should like to keep the manor-house for myself: the situation is good, and it is so large, it might be turned to account for an orphan's home, or hospital, or whatever was most wanted."

"And do you mean to go there all alone, my child?"

"I hardly know. I have been considering whether it would do to make the offer to Mrs. Grant of going with me."

"Mrs. Grant? who is she? I do not remember the name."

"You will remember all about her: she is the young widow whose husband went out as a missionary and died quite suddenly, leaving her entirely unprovided for."

"Yes, I remember now quite well. I had forgotten the name. She is trying to obtain an engagement as a daily governess, is she not? It must be a great trial to her, for her father was a man of very good fortune, and she could never have anticipated such a change. I think it would be a real act of kindness if you could provide her with a home. Do you know anything of her,—her disposition, I mean?"

"Ada remembers meeting her before she married, and thought she seemed very gentle and amiable.—Then you think I might write?"

"At any rate, you could write and propose it as a trial. You would have your own sitting-rooms, I suppose? *You* would find it particularly trying to have anyone with you constantly who was uncongenial."

"Yes, it would be rather trying; but I should think we need not be constantly together. It is such a comfort to be alone; she will no doubt feel it so also. And two can do so much more than one, that we shall be of more use at Gainsworth together, than I should be if I went alone. I had better write at once, I think, for I fear she is in a good deal of distress."

"I can only pray that a blessing may attend you. You will be at no loss 'where to bestow your fruits and your goods,' if you begin by succouring the fatherless and the widow. God bless you, my child!"

He rose up and left her, and as he turned to descend again by the flower-garden, he looked back once more into the room where the young mistress of all that fair domain, the courted and caressed, was sitting alone, joyful in the midst of her sorrow, caring nought for all that is thought most worth caring for in this world, seeking only how she might best acquit herself in her stewardship.

And what was the secret spell that upheld her, calm and unruffled by prosperity or adversity? It was that the message had come to her in the solemn stillness of the inner chamber of the heart, "The Master is come, and calleth for *thee*," and she had arisen at that call, and the unfailing promise had been fulfilled,—He had given her rest.

As soon as her uncle had left her, Constance sat down to write her letter to the widow. She worded it very carefully, so that it might seem like a courteous invitation to a friend, not an offer of charity. Her

letter was hardly finished, when another visitor was heard on the terrace; a visitor at whose step little Woolly, grown grey and somewhat fat with age, roused himself sufficiently from his doze on the mat to wag his tail against the floor.

"May I come in, Lily," asked Percy;—he could not forget the old familiar appellation, though it was seldom heard now: "Shall I interrupt you?"

"No, not at all, thank you, Percy; my letter is finished. How do you feel this morning?"

"So well, that I begin to forget I ever felt ill. People may rail as they like at our climate; a fortnight of it has done me more good than all the tonics in the world."

"You certainly look much better than you did when you arrived; and it is such a comfort to Uncle Edward to have you at home, that I think you have made him better too. He was looking so very ill. I wish you would persuade him to ride with you; it would be so good for him."

"Would you not ride with us, Lily?" Percy asked eagerly: "that would tempt him at once, I think."

The proposition seemed quite to startle her, and for a moment the tears were inclined to start,—it awoke such sudden recollections of past days; but she kept them back, and said, "I do not think I can ride, thank you, Percy; I should like very much to be with you and Uncle Edward, but I cannot ride just yet."

Her last ride had been taken with her father, not many days before his death, and she had never been able to summon resolution to mount her horse since.

Percy noticed the look of pain that passed over her face, and turned to speak of other things.

Ere many minutes had elapsed, their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by the entrance of Ada Sedgeleigh. She had walked across the park from Mrs. Lester's cottage, which was her nominal home for the present, though much of her time was passed at the Hall with Constance. The trio sat long together: Constance drew out from Percy an account of his voyage home, of Jamaica, of his life there, and many other things. He talked very pleasantly; there was the same quaint, original way of viewing things as of old; but Constance noticed that there was also the mind of a thinking, reflecting man, the clearness of judgment and decision of character that are gained by steady prosecution of the path of right amid temptations to go wrong. The seed sown in early years, and watered by a father's prayers, had borne fruit.

It occurred to Constance that Percy would enjoy having Ada to accompany him and his father on their rides. She proposed it, and found that it would be a mutual pleasure. Ada was a little nervous at first at the idea, but Percy assured her that he would take Constance's horse out for an hour or two that day, and see that it was quite quiet before she mounted it; and then the prospect of riding was very pleasant to her, and Percy certainly retained his old partiality for ladies' society. When Ada got up and took leave of Constance, he departed also, and they set out together.

There was an unconscious sigh of relief from Con-

stance as she felt herself again alone, for it was an unusual effort for her now to sustain a long conversation, and her cheeks were burning with the exertion. After an hour's quiet reading and thought, she prepared to set out on a visit to a cottage where an eye would certainly "mark her coming, and look brighter when she came."

The answer from Mrs. Grant was received in a few days. It was the letter of a sensible, lady-like woman. She accepted Constance's invitation gratefully, but without the parade of many words; and there was a tone of resignation in the few sentences in which she alluded to the sorrow that had come upon her, that drew Constance instinctively towards her.

The preparations for departure to Gainsworth were continued. Ada felt a longing to accompany Constance, but she would make no plans for the future, as she was awaiting the answer to a letter which she had written to her brother soon after their mother's death, the purport of which was to ask whether he would like her to go out and join him, as he seemed to have no thought of returning home.

Ada's worldly position had improved; that is to say, a distant relation of her mother's, who had greatly admired her consistent character, had, at his death, left her £5,000, and this sum, added to her share of her mother's little fortune, made her independent.

Constance's thought of persuading Ada to ride proved a very happy one. Percy had less trouble in prevailing on his father occasionally to leave his

study and his parish, when he assured him that his presence was needed to induce Miss Sedgeleigh to go out, and she certainly would derive benefit from fresh air and exercise. Ada was a great favourite with the Rector. Her natural shyness and timidity had been almost overcome, but there was left a feeling of longing for some one to cling and look up to, which did not make her less loveable. Her mother had been unable to guide, and indeed looked to her daughter for direction, instead of giving it; so that since her brother's departure, Ada had had to depend on her own judgment. It was no doubt good for one of her temperament to be forced to decide and act. But it was certainly a great comfort to her to be with those to whom she could look up, as she did to the Rector and Aunt Mabel.

Ada and Percy longed for Constance to accompany them, but they never pressed it, for both had sufficient tact to see at once how painful the idea was to her. They often talked of her in their rides, and her ears might have tingled during their conversations, for there was no lack of admiration bestowed upon her.

"She is so sweet and gentle in her sorrow," Percy once remarked: "I have often seen trouble make people sullen and morose, but it only seems to have made her more than ever full of sympathy and kindness; I wonder where the difference lies."

"I think," Ada answered, rather shyly, "that Constance feels that all trouble is sent in love; while to some it seems only a punishment and an evil, under which they fret and chafe angrily."

"Well, fret and chafe as we may, there is no escaping it when it comes," Percy replied.

"No; and then it is in truth trouble. But to Constance it is a blessing: she makes me think of those who—

'From the brink all mire and wet,
Pluck the sweet-scented violet.'"

CHAPTER II.

"Her lot is on you—to be found untired,
Watching the stars out by the bed of pain,
With a pale cheek, and yet a brow inspired,
And a true heart of hope, tho' hope be vain;—
Meekly to bear with wrong, to cheer decay,
And oh ! to love thro' all things,—therefore pray."

Mrs. HEMANS.

ON the evening of a hot, oppressive day in August, the train stopped at Gainsworth, and two ladies in deep mourning got out of one of the carriages.

A respectable elderly man, who had the appearance of an upper servant, and a maid descended from one of the second-class carriages at the same time, and came quickly forward, attending with earnest respect on the taller of the two ladies.

Their luggage was soon arranged on the fly that was in attendance for them, and Constance and Mrs. Grant drove through the smoky, dusty streets to the manor-house. Constance smiled pleasantly at her companion, and said, "Did I prepare you for such a city of chimneys, or is it more gloomy than you expected?"

The manor-house was soon reached, and at the open door, ready to welcome them, stood the Rector of Elvanlees. He had insisted on going by an earlier train, that he might see that all was ready for Constance's reception; and as he helped her out of the carriage, and led her up the steps into the hall, he

murmured in earnest tones, "God bless you, my child, in your new home, and in all that your hand finds to do in it!"

That was a solemn evening for Constance, as her uncle read prayers for the first time in the house that was to be henceforth her home, and asked for a blessing on the mistress of the household, and on her future life.

Many of the servants from Elvanlees had begged to be allowed to accompany her. The butler, who had lived there in her grandfather's time, was one with whom she could not part, and he was to act as porter, and superintend such of the domestic arrangements as a master would have overlooked. Her own maid, who was willing to take part in any work her mistress assigned to her, accompanied her also; for, with a little training, Constance thought she might be very useful in assisting her in a school. The butler's wife was to act at present as house-keeper; and the under servants had been selected with great care.

The new church which Mr. Montrevor had been so anxious to build was completed and consecrated before his death. He had laid the foundation-stone, and been present at the consecration, and it had many hallowed associations in Constance's eyes. Schools, and a clergyman's house, had also been built: all these were very near the manor-house; and a large part of the parish which lay on that side had been made into a separate district.

The next morning the clergyman called on Constance. He had been only recently appointed,—his

predecessor having resigned in consequence of ill-health. He had never seen Constance before, and when he heard that the lady of the manor was coming to reside, he had imagined to himself a comely, somewhat portly, middle-aged dame. He almost started when he saw the lovely young woman, looking still almost a girl, who rose with mingled dignity and gentleness to greet him as he entered, introduced by her uncle.

It was some little time before he could sufficiently recover from his surprise, to talk with any clearness on the subjects that were of most interest to her: and then he marvelled as much at her intelligence and thoughtfulness, as at her beauty.

Constance soon saw that she and Mrs. Grant would be at no loss for employment, and her offers to do whatever she could were received with gratitude and surprise. It was truly a case where "the harvest was plenteous," but the labourers of every description were few.

Could Percy have heard the account given by the clergyman to his wife of his visit, he would perhaps have felt less indignant with Gainsworth for taking Constance away, for he would have known that she was not unappreciated. His description of Constance was panegyric sufficient to have pleased even Percy; and his speech ended with, "I cannot describe to you the impetus it seems to give me to be more than ever 'up and doing,' when I think of that beautiful young creature, having given up her home, friends, society, everything that one would suppose would have been most enjoyable, to come and spend life, youth, and

energy in such a place as this;—it is truly a case of loving ‘not in word, but in deed.’”

Constance and Mrs. Grant did not begin their work that day; they found plenty to do in superintending the arrangements in the house. Constance was hardly acquainted with it, and was surprised at its size. For the present, the large drawing-room and library were to be left unfurnished. A smaller drawing-room, and another room near it, which had been the study in the old Mr. Montrevor's time, were the two rooms that were chosen for sitting-rooms for Constance and Mrs. Grant; and ‘Uncle Edward’ employed himself diligently in arranging books, and hanging up the prints which Constance had brought with her.

He intended to return to Elvanlees the next day, and he and Constance had one long, last talk in the evening. Her uncle reminded her that she had agreed to remain here only for some months, and said that he thought it might be well for her to fix a time for her first visit to Elvanlees. He was anxious that her decision should be tested in every way before it was ultimately fixed, and he thought that a return to Elvanlees, with all its beauties, after a few months' sojourn in this smoky town, would make the contrast so striking, that she would be better able to realize what the sacrifice was which she wished to make.

She smiled when he had said something to this effect to her, and answered softly, “I do not think a sacrifice is felt when it is made for one we love.”

He understood the full and deep meaning of her words, and could say no more; but when he was in his own room at night, he soliloquised to himself,—“I

trust I am not throwing hindrances in her path, and holding her back. I wonder if I should feel the same, if it were another than my son who would benefit by the sacrifice she desires to make. If he were not to possess her estate, perhaps I should not see so many reasons for making her delay her decision; but as it is, I cannot help it."

Before her uncle was gone the next day Constance had agreed to his wish, that she should return to Elvanlees for Christmas. He bore a loving message to Aunt Mabel from Constance, begging her, if she felt equal to the journey, to come and pay her one little visit. "Tell her," were the concluding words of the message, "that Gainsworth will be much more like home when I have seen her in it."

Constance and Mrs. Grant by degrees fell into their work. They were strange, uncouth people, for the most part, amongst whom they laboured, very unlike the rural population of Elvanlees, with their almost feudal feeling of love and respect for their landlord; and it was often painful to be met with coldness when kindness was intended; but Constance had prepared herself for all this. It was love of Him for whom she worked, and not love of the work itself, which was her spring of action, and that was a spring which would not change or fail.

But her sweet, winning manners could not be resisted, and the visits of "the lady," as she was with one consent called, were soon universally welcomed. Mrs. Grant's disposition was one apt to be easily cast down and discouraged, and Constance had often to pass the evening hours, when she would especially

have enjoyed solitude for rest and refreshment, in cheering and enlivening the young widow. But from a child Constance had always longed to see others happy, and the natural feeling had now become a settled principle.

One evening not long after the removal to Gainsworth, Constance was returning home from a later visit than usual to a poor sick woman, when her attention was aroused by the angry tones of the master of a small grocer's shop, addressing a poor girl, who seemed pleading with almost agonized earnestness. "I don't care what's the matter," were the man's words; "but not a farthing's worth of anything shall you have from my shop, till you bring the money in your hand to pay for it;" and as he spoke, he pushed her roughly aside.

As the girl came out into the street, she looked wildly round her, and groaned forth,—“Oh, mother, mother, must I see you perish for want before my eyes? Is there no help? is there no God in heaven?”

She seemed about to rush forward, as if she hardly knew where she was going, or what to do next, when Constance gently touched her arm: “Is your mother so very ill?” she asked.

The girl answered at first as if she knew not who spoke, and had lost all hope of assistance: “Ill! yes, —dying, dying of starvation, in a cold, dark garret, and crying to me like a little child for a light, and a drop of tea to moisten her parched, burning throat, and I must stand there and see her misery, and do nothing to help her!”

There was no doubting the truth of those words of

agony—they were too miserably real; and when Constance said, “I will get you some tea for her, and come and see her,” the girl started as if an angel had suddenly crossed her path.

Constance told the girl to come with her, and asked her a few questions as they walked. She found it would not delay her many moments to call at the manor-house on their way, so she went hastily in, and taking what, from the poor girl’s account of her mother, she thought might be needed, she prepared to set off with her again. But at the porter’s lodge she met with a delay she did not expect: Symonds, the old butler, stepped forward, and said very respectfully, but decidedly, “If you please, Ma’am, if you are going out again, please to allow me to go with you. You were never used to this sort of thing, Ma’am, and it makes me uneasy.”

She smiled, and gave the kind old man the permission he required, and telling the girl to walk by her to shew her the way, she set out, Symonds following a little behind.

As they walked fast, there was not much time for speaking, and when they reached the house, Jenny Morton, (for she it was, whose unhappy history we heard long ago,) began hastily to ascend the stairs. Constance asked Symonds to wait without for her, and followed Jenny: she thought they should never come to the end of the stairs, but at last the room was reached. It was quite dark, but Jenny quickly struck a match, and lighted the candle Constance had provided; and then going up to the bed, knelt down beside it, and taking one of the cold hands of the

poor old woman who lay there, murmured tenderly, "Oh, mother, such blessed news; she's come at last, the beautiful lady of your dream." The old woman opened her eyes, looked round till she saw Constance, and then whispered in a faint voice, "Thank God! I may die in peace now: my child, you'll be safe."

Constance saw at once the state of exhaustion in which she was, and immediately told Jenny to put a teaspoonful of wine into her mouth: she had brought both wine and teaspoon with her, having learnt by experience that it was unwise to trust to the hope of finding anything that might be requisite in these miserable lodgings.

She sat beside the poor old woman whilst Jenny ran down stairs to boil some water in a neighbour's room, to make the tea. The wine had a reviving effect, and the exhausted sufferer from time to time opened her eyes, fixed them on Constance, smiled as if she saw a long-expected friend beside her, and then murmured, "Thank God!"

When Jenny returned, Constance took her leave, promising to call again the next day, and as she walked home through the narrow, dirty streets, swarming now with the people returning home to their nightly haunts, speaking with rude, loud voices, she felt a peace and a calm that could not be ruffled by sight or sound, and her heart sent up the old woman's words of praise, "Thank God!"—"Your joy no man taketh from you."

She fulfilled her promise of visiting old Mrs. Morton the next day, and felt much interest in her, and in her patient, dutiful daughter; and it was a bond of

sympathy between them that each had once lived in the beautiful, peaceful country.

“And have you left it to come to such an awful place as this, where there’s naught but sin and misery?” was the old woman’s exclamation, when Constance told her that she too had lived amidst the green fields and trees which poor Jenny and her mother so sighed after. “You’ll be terrible lonely, I fear, dear lady.”

Constance’s answer brought the tears to the eyes of the listener; it was, “Oh no, not lonely, for God is with us in every place.”

“Ah! and that’s what I’ve forgot to think of; and its been a weight of misery too hard for me to bear,” was the answer.

Constance sat on for some time with them, and heard the history of the dream, and how they had tried to cheer their hearts with it through many years of wearing misery.

Then the poor mother’s lip quivered, and she opened what was the sorest grief of all—the wild and reckless life of her youngest son. He had left her now, and for many months she had neither seen nor heard anything of him, and her anxiety on his account left her no rest.

She looked anxiously at Constance as she finished her history, as if expecting that here too she could bring relief. For the first moment Constance did not speak, and the poor mother half-raised herself on her elbow, and said, “Tell me, dear lady, what shall I do for him?”

“I cannot tell you to do more than that which I

have no doubt you have always done—pray for him,” Constance answered gently: “Those words seem always so full of comfort, ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee;’ and oh, how true they are!”

“Say them again—say them again!” the old woman said eagerly, as if thirsting for their comfort.

Constance said them again, and said them with the simple, earnest tone of a child repeating a loving father’s promise, whose word never could be doubted.

Before the visit ended, Jenny had repeated the wish her mother had from time to time expressed to see the clergyman, and Constance gladly promised to let him know.

The poor mother never rallied, and though now Constance took care that she should be supplied with all that was needed, her strength did not return, and she sank gradually. Her one earthly wish was to see her son once more; but though every exertion was made to discover his present haunts, no traces of him could be found. His mother, as each effort failed, repeated patiently to herself the words Constance had said to her, and seemed meekly to strive to submit. Her heart had no longer any fears for her daughter, for Constance had promised to provide for her. And ere long she was called upon to fulfil her promise, for the long life of suffering was ended, and Jenny was left an orphan.

After the funeral, Constance took her to the manor-house. From her she heard of many other young girls nearly as destitute as herself: some who had come from neighbouring villages to work at the mills,

and lodged in the town; others who had no mothers, and wild, drunken fathers, who neglected them entirely. As Jenny Morton told Constance all these sad histories, it occurred to her that it might be desirable to form a kind of lodging-house for these poor girls, in a wing of the manor-house that was never used now.

She talked over her plan with Mrs. Grant, and when they had arranged it, she wrote to her uncle to ask his advice; and on receiving his approval, she consulted the clergyman of the district. It was what he had for a long time most desired, and he believed that such an asylum would be of the greatest benefit to many. There seemed no obstacle to its being commenced at once; and when the rooms were furnished, Constance gave Jenny leave to bring two or three of the girls to her whom she had mentioned.

They had heard of "the lady," and all that she had done, and were pleased at knowing that they might see her. When they came, Constance told them of her plan, and of the rules she had laid down to be observed by those who came to the house, and then said she should be willing to admit them, if they would conform to the rules. Her gentleness and sweet looks were very pleasant to these poor girls, so little used to words of kindness, and her offer was at once accepted: and before many weeks had passed, entreaties to be admitted were so frequent, that every bed was occupied.

Every hour of Constance's time was now filled up, and the fulfilment of her duties brought with it an indescribable sense of peace. She often recalled her

early longings after goodness, her childhood's conversations with Eustace, her theories of perfection. Her visions of intense happiness would float across her too, but they awoke not a thought of repining. No; she felt that all her desires, all her prayers, had been answered, but in a far different way from what she could have imagined: and from her heart she could say, "He hath done all things well."

If there was one wound that had never yet healed over, she knew the balm to apply,—and ever uprose the prayer, "Father, bring him home; draw him to Thyself."

As Christmas drew on, she grew rather uneasy at the thought of leaving Mrs. Grant alone with so much to be done and attended to; but her anxiety was dispelled when Mrs. Grant told her that it would be a great pleasure to her sister to come and stay with her during Constance's absence.

This being satisfactorily arranged, Constance prepared for her departure. She fixed the 23rd as the day of her return to Elvanlees, and great was the excitement there when the news travelled from mouth to mouth, that Miss Montrevor was coming home again. There was a great desire to put up arches of evergreens over the road, and at the lodge-gates, in testimony of joy at her return; but her uncle knew with what feelings she must be coming back to her father's home, and gently discouraged all outward signs of rejoicing, and was steady in refusing the old clerk's request, that "the bells might ring her a peal."

The snow was on the ground, and the sky had that peculiar leaden hue so common when snow is in the

atmosphere; the sun was sinking like a globe of fire, as the carriage which had been sent to the station to meet Constance, drove towards the south lodge.

Old Stephen was still alive: the strong had been taken, the weak left. He called to his grand-daughter for his crutches at her announcement that she heard wheels, and dragged himself to the house-door as the girl ran out to be ready with the open gate. The carriage drove through; Constance looked out and smiled: it *was* a smile, though it was an effort to force one; and then her eyes turned to the old Scotch firs, and the seat on the hill-side.

The girl stood looking after the carriage for some moments, and then came in with the tears in her eyes: "Oh, grandfather," she began, "how beautiful she looked! so kind, but so grave. Do you remember that bright summer evening, long, long ago, when she came home, and the gentleman she was to marry with her, and they looked so happy, both of them. Oh, how sad it is for her now to go back to that lonely house!"

"No, my girl," the old man answered solemnly, "it's not sad,—and she's not sad. Ah, many's the time she sat with me since dear master died, and read chapters to me when my eyes were tired; and ah! how her face would brighten, and her eyes glisten; and I've said to myself, when she left, Thank God, she'll never want comfort, for He Himself has spoken to her heart."

Constance drove on; the iron gates were thrown open,—the blinding tears would hardly let her see which of her poor friends or servants it was who

stood bowing at the gate,—and in another moment the carriage rolled up to the door.

She remembered nothing more till she found herself in the morning-room, Aunt Mabel's arm round her, her uncle standing beside her with one hand clasped in his. Perhaps never more strongly had she felt whose presence was wanted there.

Strange it is, that grief seems to sleep for a season, and then a word, a thought, a sound, will awaken it in full force, as if only restored to intenser life by its interval of repose.

CHAPTER III.

"But side by side they flow,
Two fountains flowing from one smitten heart;
And oftentimes scarcely to be known apart,
That gladness and that woe."

TRENCH.

CHRISTMAS-DAY, with all its train of rejoicing, had passed; the dinner to the poor people and the school-children had been given, and all had gone on as of old, though many eyes there were that filled with tears as the gentle lady went from one to another, speaking kind words, trying to look bright and cheerful, that she might bring no sadness over other hearts.

There was quite a party at the Hall now, for the Rector, Aunt Mabel, and Percy, Mrs. Lester, and Ada were staying there.

They were all sitting round the fire in the morning-room one evening after dinner, when a message was brought in that some one wished to speak to the Rector. It was so usual an occurrence, that it attracted no attention, and the conversation went on as before. But what was the father's surprise when, in the dining-room, which he carelessly entered, stood Eustace! For the first moment neither spoke nor moved, and then there were words of rejoicing, incoherent and unintelligible.

"I did not mean him to bring you in so abruptly," Eustace began, after the first moments were over; "but I suppose he did not know what to say."

"I thought he muttered something about 'come home,' but I confess I did not pay much attention, thinking my *parishioner* would explain what I had to hear. Ah, my boy, I little thought who that parishioner was to be. And are you well? quite well and strong?"

"Yes, my father; I feel a different man altogether in that sunny clime. You have not received my last letter, I suppose?"

"None that spoke of your return."

"I knew it was a mere chance which would travel fastest, myself or my letter; but I did write one, and sent it off about a week before I sailed. My departure was very sudden: the Bishop was obliged either to return home himself, or send some one on important business, and he could ill be spared just then; so he asked me to undertake the voyage; and the thought of home and seeing you once more made it a most pleasant proposition to me. But tell me how they all are. I had your letter just before I sailed, which told me of the mournful changes here. How does Constance bear up?"

There was much to tell, and the father had begun to speak of Gainsworth, and of all that had happened, when he suddenly checked himself, saying, "But I must not keep you here, when there are so many who would be longing to see you, did they know that a wall instead of an ocean divided you from them now. I will go and prepare them. Aunt Mabel and Percy are here."

He left, and pausing a few moments in the hall, went on to the morning-room. His face told Constance ere he spoke that something unusual had occurred, and in another minute, with almost a shout

and a bound, Percy was in the dining-room. Aunt Mabel and Constance soon followed. There were many thoughts of the past and the present, of joy and sorrow strangely blended together in the hearts of that little party who met so unexpectedly.

For some time Ada and Mrs. Lester were forgotten, and when Constance said she would go and speak to Ada, Eustace seemed suddenly to remember that he had good news for her. Her brother had accompanied him to England, and would follow him to Elvanlees very soon; business detained him in London for the present. Constance lingered not a moment in conveying the joyful tidings; and kind Mrs. Lester, in her pleasure at the universal happiness, seemed not the least joyful of the party.

Two days had passed since Eustace's return without Constance's finding an opportunity for a quiet conversation with her uncle, though she had much desired one. Ever since her cousin's return, the conviction had been strong upon her that now was the time to speak to him about remaining at home, and taking possession of Elvanlees. As it was entailed, she could not legally make it over to him, but if he would consent to live there as landlord, she felt that then she should not have the slightest scruple in remaining always at Gainsworth. And every week that she had passed there had convinced her how much good might be done for its poor inhabitants.

One morning after breakfast she was returning from an early visit to the school. Her shortest road home was through the churchyard; but she needed not an excuse to pass that way, for hardly a day went by

without her paying a visit to the hallowed graves—her loved spot in “God’s Acre.” She had visited her father’s, and was standing beside poor Clara’s, feeling how changed she was since first she had stood beside it, when she heard a step passing near. It was her uncle; he would not disturb her, but he had stood for some moments watching her, and musing on her gentle, lovely character, and then turned away, and took the path to the Rectory.

When his footstep aroused Constance, she determined to follow him, and seek now the conversation she had so much desired. The Rectory was nearly deserted, as its inmates still staid on with Constance at the Hall; so she met no one to delay her progress as she walked to the study door, knocked, and waited permission to enter. The conversation need not be detailed, for it was similar to that which they previously had on the same subject. It will suffice to say that this time Constance prevailed on her uncle to allow the offer to be made at once. She wished that he should make it, and begged that it might not be delayed.

Returning home, she saw two figures walking on the terrace, on the side on which the uninhabited drawing-room and saloon opened; they were apparently in earnest conversation: as she drew nearer, she could distinguish that they were Percy and Ada. The thought crossed her mind, that they were often together now, and she felt glad that Percy should have such a sweet companion.

She had not been long seated in the morning-room before a knock was heard at the door, and

Percy came in. He looked full of happiness, as if he had just heard some most joyful tidings, and his merry manner was changed into one of subdued gladness. He asked Constance if he might speak to her, and she looked up and smiled in answer to the request. For a few moments there was a pause, and then he said, "Lily, shall you think me worthy?—your friend has promised to be mine."

"Ada! Oh, Percy, I am so glad!"

"Glad! I was afraid you would not like to trust her to me; but, Lily, I will try to make her happy."

"Percy," Constance said, and she held out her hand to him, "I am sure, if her happiness depends upon you, it will be safe. I do not think you could have told me anything that could have given me so much pleasure. Dear Ada! you will have a treasure; you will have a sweet, gentle wife." She smiled as she said the last word; and Percy could not resist kissing the little hand he held in his. She looked at him once more; it was a look of such happiness, such rejoicing in another's joy, that, as she left the room, saying she must go to Ada, he could not help murmuring to himself, "Oh, Lily, what a wife *you* would have made!"

Ada was in her own room, her bonnet thrown off, her burning cheeks buried in her hands, when Constance came in. In a moment Constance was beside her, her arms were thrown round her neck, and tender, loving words were poured forth.

Ada could not speak, but she looked in Constance's face, and kissed her again and again. The two friends sat on together; the thoughts of each were of the

other, for Ada could not help recalling, as she felt her own great happiness, the joy that had been in Constance's grasp once, and had been relinquished. When Constance told her how happy she was at the thought of Percy having such a wife, and said that now she should feel as if they were sisters, for Eustace and Percy had always been as brothers to her, Ada had one of her shy looks of former days, as she said, "It seems all to have come so suddenly upon me; I never should have thought that he could have cared for me; he was so merry and quick, and I have felt that I have grown so old and dull the last few years."

"That indeed you have not," Constance answered, warmly: "How often I have wished that Percy could have a kind, good wife, for he is so kind himself, and with all his fun and merriment, there is so much deep feeling and such an earnest longing to do right, which has strengthened so much since his illness. Oh, Ada, you have a happy lot in store, to bless and be blessed."

As the words came forth earnestly, and with deep feeling, Ada felt what it must have been to Constance to give up such happiness herself, and could not restrain herself from saying, "O, dear Constance, I think I never knew till now what you must have gone through. Oh, how I long for you to have this happiness again."

"No, no, Ada," Constance answered, calmly and softly, "that happiness was not for me; I have long felt it: I was too weak for it; I should have rested in it, and have thought I had found a heaven here. Oh, it was all most merciful, most just; I see it all so clearly now. I should have been engrossed with it: my nature was far too eager, too impulsive; it needed

that utter wreck of all its hopes and joys to tame it down to see earth and earth's joys as they should be seen by travellers on its foreign shores."

Ada looked grave, as she answered, "It makes me quite unhappy to hear you speak so; you are so young to feel all the joy of life gone. I thought it was gone for me too, and yet it has burst forth again brighter than ever it was before; but I hardly dare to take it, if you feel it to be so unsafe."

"Oh no, Ada, do not let me make you sad; I am so happy myself. I did not mean to give you a melancholy impression; I have far, far more joy than I can understand or express,—but in deep thankfulness to Him who gave it," she added, in a low, earnest tone, after a short pause. "All natures need not the same training,—a stimulant which would be poison to one in a fever, would bring life and vigour to another. Let us thankfully take whatever our heavenly Physician prescribes for us: humbly and tremblingly, if it be joy; calmly and willingly, if it be sorrow. He, I believe, dearest, has given you this joy; take it from *His* hands, ask Him to bless, purify, and sanctify it; and then you will serve Him in rejoicing, as you have done in sorrow."

Ada looked up and smiled, and whispered, "Will you pray for me? It seems such a great responsibility to enter upon an entirely new sphere of duties."

"Yes, it is; but strength to fulfil them will come with them. It is ever given, when sought," Constance murmured, while she kissed Ada gently.

That afternoon Harry Sedgeleigh arrived. It was a joyful welcoming to him to hear of his sister's happiness.

Night had closed in, and Constance had had the curtains drawn and lights brought in the morning-room, where she was sitting alone, when another visitor came to her. It was Eustace. With what a different step and heart he sought her now, from that with which he had paid her his farewell visit in that room, the summer before he left England. His efforts had been entirely successful; though he hardly loved Constance less, it was with an altered love, — a love that could calmly contemplate the truth that she could never be his; in fact, he had ceased to desire it. His work, and Him for whom he worked, so filled his heart, that it had time for few other thoughts.

Constance's proposition had that morning been made known to Eustace by his father, and he now sought her to thank her for the generous offer, and to tell her the resolution at which he had arrived.

Constance was pleased to see him come; she liked to tell him of her plans, and ask his advice; and she delighted in hearing of his cheering labours: and they could now talk unreservedly together, as they used to do in days long past, when both their hearts had the peace and guilelessness of childhood.

Eustace stood by the mantelpiece, near the low chair on which Constance was seated, and began at once to speak on the subject that was uppermost in his thoughts. He thanked her warmly for her kind wish, but assured her that he could not accept it. Everything seemed to call upon him to return, and continue the work he had begun. There was a most crying want of assistance, and much that had been projected would have to be relinquished if one of the

little band of clergy deserted his post. If the property had been his by right of inheritance, he said, it would have been different; then it would have been his duty to return to it, but now taking possession of it would be his free choice; and he felt that God's providence called him elsewhere. These were arguments which to Constance were unanswerable; she would not have urged him further for a moment. And she told him of her desire, in the event of his refusal, to give it up to Percy. There seemed no reason to object to this in any way: Percy's residing at Elvanlees would be the greatest comfort to his father, and he was well fitted to manage an estate.

Before another day had passed, Constance had made known her wish to her uncle, and he had revealed it to his son. Percy was greatly surprised, and unwilling at first that Constance should resign her home; but further conversation with his father convinced him that it was really her determination, and before long it was all satisfactorily arranged. Percy and Ada were to take possession of Elvanlees on their marriage, which it was proposed should take place soon. For many reasons this was desirable: Eustace and Harry Sedgeleigh would remain but a very short time in England, and both naturally wished to be present at their brother and sister's wedding. Percy had decided on leaving the army. It was doubtful whether his health would have permitted his returning to the West Indies, if he had desired it; and, of course, to be in a regiment on foreign service was altogether incompatible with managing a large landed property in England.

Constance agreed, at Ada's urgent entreaty, to remain at Elvanlees till after the marriage. But she felt that life was indeed full of strange changes, as she interested herself in the preparations for a wedding at Elvanlees. It was to be very quiet; Percy and Ada both wished it, and felt especially anxious to spare Constance any unnecessary fatigue or excitement. General Lessington was one of the few guests invited; his affection for Constance made him gladly accept the invitation. But it required all his self-possession to speak to her calmly, when on his arrival he was shewn into the well-known room, where he found her sitting alone.

The wedding-day arrived; Constance laid aside her black dress, and assisted in decking the happy, trembling bride, arranging the wreath and veil herself, and soothing Ada by her calm and gentle kindness. She would herself much have preferred taking no part in the marriage, but being present only as one of the congregation; nevertheless, when both Percy and Ada could not resist entreating her to be bridesmaid, with a strong effort she laid aside her own desires and consented. It was but one day more of trial, she argued with herself. As her uncle gave her his arm to lead her to the Rectory, where, contrary to established custom, they had agreed to meet after the service, he was almost startled at her paleness, and the expression on her face, as if she had overtaken her strength. But she bore up till all was over, though it was certainly a great relief to find herself quietly in her own room, with no further need for exertion.

She staid a few days at Elvanlees after the wedding,

as General Lessington seemed to like to be there; and when he went, she took leave of Eustace and the rest of the party, and returned to Gainsworth.

All had gone on prosperously during her absence; and Mrs. Grant's sister, who had been staying there whilst Constance was at Elvanlees, was very glad to accept the offer of making it her permanent home. Constance's next plan was that of establishing a small hospital for cases that were not admissible into the general hospital. The wing corresponding to the one used for the home of young girls was to be arranged for this purpose; and Jenny Morton most gladly consented to act as one of the nurses. Constance had hoped that the rooms might have been used at once; but several alterations were required, and delays occurred, so that the spring and summer wore away before the necessary arrangements could be completed.

Constance's usual work occupied all her time; and most gladly did she spend it in such a cause. It would have seemed strange indeed to her now, could she have returned to those scenes in which she had once taken a part, or have followed General Lessington on his return to London.

Parliament had met early this year, and Lady Fitzmaure had accompanied her husband to London. Frances Ellermaine was staying with her aunt; and, in order to see her, and give her an account of Constance, General Lessington paid an early visit to Lady Fitzmaure's house. He did not expect to find a very deeply interested listener in Lady Fitzmaure, but Frances, he thought, must be pleased to hear of her

cousin: but he speedily discovered that both were vexed and annoyed by Constance's relinquishment of Elvanlees, and by her present mode of life.

Lady Fitzmaure spoke in an irritable tone, as if she were personally aggrieved by Constance's choice of another way of passing her time than that which she herself had adopted. "There is nothing I object to so much," she concluded, "as young people setting themselves to do differently from others, as if they were so much better and wiser than their elders."

General Lessington could hardly hear Constance found fault with patiently, and answered, "Had all thought as you do, we should be living in huts instead of palaces now."

Lady Fitzmaure did not follow this argument, but continued her complaint: "It is so absurd, setting the opinion of the world so entirely at defiance."

"I have followed the opinion of the world, Lady Fitzmaure," General Lessington answered, gravely, "for the greater part of threescore years and ten, and I do not know that the world has repaid me for my allegiance. I am an old man, and perhaps you will think my brain is become a little misty; but I confess that though I have not gone and done likewise, I can honour any individual who has strength to make a noble decision, and to adhere to it in spite of scorn and ridicule, without considering himself bound hand and foot to obey the self-constituted tribunal which is designated 'the world.' At best, its power over us is but short; and there is a citizenship which is more abiding. We seem very decidedly to lay down the law how much, or perhaps how little, religion will

take us to heaven, and are indignant with those who presume to adopt another standard from that which we have decided shall be universal. But excuse me if I confess that I cannot help thinking of the homely old proverb, 'Do not hollo till you are out of the wood.'"

His earnestness made Lady Fitzmaure see that she touched on a subject in which he was more keenly interested than she had supposed, and she resumed her remarks in an altered and softened tone: "You must forgive me, General, if I say that I cannot help considering both Miss Montrevor and her cousin most strange and unnatural characters;—I mean such characters, that if I were reading of them I should call them quite overdrawn. And I cannot believe but that in a few years we shall hear that they both return to every-day life and its enjoyments, and laugh at the folly of their youth."

General Lessington was thoughtful for a moment before he answered, and then said, "If you mean by unnatural, uncommon, I grant you that they are most uncommon; and I can well understand that to those who have not seen them, it may seem that they are actuated by a temporary excitement. But the excitement in Miss Montrevor's case has been coming on so very gradually, and increasing so steadily, that I think it must be allowed that it has assumed the form of settled principle rather than sudden impulse, which is, I conclude, what is understood by excitement. Her cousin's decision has, you know, stood the test of years; he may fail before the end, but I do not expect that he will. You will forgive me, Lady Fitz-

maure, if I have spoken too eagerly ; and now I will not longer interrupt your pleasant *tête-à-tête*, but will wish you a good-morning."

He got up and left the room ; and as he went down stairs he murmured to himself, "This is a strange world, certainly, where we will not travel onwards ourselves, and are angry with all who attempt to advance."

CHAPTER IV.

"Heav'n has an end in all."

HENRY THE EIGHTH.

AUTUMN had set in before the little hospital, with all its convenient arrangements, was completed : and after the last of the carpenters, who had been engaged in putting up beds and other furniture, had left, Constance and Mrs. Grant went through the rooms. "How neat and nice it all looks," Mrs. Grant remarked; "I wonder who will be your first patient. I can but think it will be a blessing to whoever is brought here."

They returned to their sitting-rooms, and Constance was engaged with an evening-class of her poor girls, when some one knocked hurriedly at the door. She went to it herself, and was met by Symonds, who almost incoherently informed her that there had been a terrible accident on the railway,—some lives lost, and many persons seriously injured. They did not know what to do with the poor sufferers, and the surgeons who had been summoned to the spot had sent down to ask whether Miss Montrevor would admit any into her hospital.

Constance hesitated not a moment, but begged that as many as the rooms could receive might be brought. She dismissed her class, and went at once to the hospital to see that everything was prepared; and ere many minutes elapsed she heard the heavy tread of

men bearing on stretchers, one after another, the poor helpless forms of the sufferers. They were laid on the beds, and the doctors were beside them, doing all that could be done. Constance nerved herself to hold the light calmly, as one fractured limb after another was set.

They passed on to a little room, which only admitted one patient. The surgeon stepped up to the bed, and spoke to its occupant, but no words came in answer. "He has fainted," he said: "may I trouble you to hold the candle so as to let the light fall full on his face, while I drop this into his lips."

Constance obeyed, and raised the candle; but as the light revealed the features of him who lay there, she turned deadly faint, and unconsciously sank on a chair.

"You are faint; you have tried yourself too much; you had better go and lie down," said the surgeon, quietly.

His words aroused Constance: "It is nothing," she said; "it will pass;" and she held up the light again, while she pressed her hand to her heart and gasped for breath; as she stood beside the bed and raised her eyes almost wildly; and her spirit breathed forth the prayer, "Father, help me."

"There is nothing more to be done for the present," the surgeon said, at length; "I had better go elsewhere."

"Is he very ill?" Constance asked, in a voice that sounded hollow and unnatural.

"Very," the surgeon answered; "a perfectly hopeless case, I should imagine: the left lung is most

seriously injured. I should not be surprised if he did not rally at all;" and he prepared to move on.

"And can nothing be done for him?"

"Nothing more than to try to revive him. A few drops of this," he said, pointing to a little bottle, "might be given him from time to time, but he has no power to swallow yet. It might be well if some one remained near, and tried at intervals if he could take it."

"I will do so, and some one else shall hold the light for you," Constance said; and she dragged her trembling limbs to the door, and directed Jane Morton, who was coming out of one of the other rooms, to accompany the surgeon.

They passed on, and Constance stood again beside the bed. She neither spoke nor moved; she clasped her hands, and gazed with an awe-struck, bewildered gaze on him who lay there; her breath came with difficulty, and the cold perspiration stood on her forehead. After some moments she sank on her knees, and murmured, so low that no sound could be heard, "Oh, Gerard, Gerard, is it thus I am to see you again! Oh, Father, help me, guide me; have pity on him, save him, save him." And then she buried her face in her hands, and trembled in every limb. When after some little time she tried to raise herself, to obey the doctor's orders and administer a few drops of the stimulant, it was with the utmost difficulty that she stood, and she could hardly guide her hand to his lips. But it was a useless effort,—the power of swallowing had not returned.

In the course of about half an hour the doctor

came back; he shook his head as he looked at his patient, and said, "I wish we knew where to send to let his friends know of his state, for there is no time to lose. This is by far the most dangerous case in the house. It would be better to see if there are any letters or papers that could give his address;" and he put his hand into the pockets of the coat. There were no letters, but there was a memorandum-case, in which the well-known name was written.

Constance started at the sound, when the doctor read it out, as if it had been a voice from the dead. By an immense effort of self-control, she said faintly, "That name is familiar to my uncle; I will send off by the express to-night to request him to come immediately. Can you wait here till I return, or shall I send some one?"

"I will wait," he answered; and Constance left the room. She feared the accident might prevent the trains from running that night, but she went to her room and sent for Symonds. She told him it was of the utmost importance that Mr. Montrevor should be summoned to Gainsworth immediately, and the kind old man, noticing her agitation and extreme paleness, instantly offered to set off for Elvanlees. There was no injury to the lines; the accident had been caused by a luggage-train running into a passenger-train, and the express would start at the usual hour. "He can be here by mid-day to-morrow, Ma'am," the old man said, kindly: "shall I take any letter?"

Constance sat down and wrote two lines: "Gerard is here, and dying; can you come to me immediately?" and sealing the envelope, put it into Symonds'

hand, saying, "You will tell him first that there has been an accident, then give him this; and oh! do not let anything delay you."

The faithful messenger departed instantly, and Constance returned to the sick-room; and as she entered it she felt as if she had been in a trance, and had awoke from it in another world. There was something strangely unreal in some little questions on domestic arrangements that Jane Morton asked her in an under-tone at the door. It seemed as if all ordinary needs must have ceased now.

The surgeon was seated by the bed, feeling the sick man's pulse, but he rose respectfully as Constance came in, and placed a chair for her. "I think there is a slight amendment in our patient," he said; "it will not be safe to leave him alone for a moment; if he revives, every effort must be made to restore animation. Have you any one you can trust to sit up with him to-night, or shall I procure a nurse?"

"That will not be necessary; I will take care that he is watched. Do you think that consciousness will return?" She turned away her face as she spoke, fearing to betray the intense suspense with which the answer was awaited.

"It is impossible to say; but I shall not leave the house to-night, and will come into the room occasionally. Had you not better lie down yourself? you look very much exhausted."

"Thank you," Constance answered, "I think we shall need all the nurses we can procure to-night, and I will take my part."

There was that in her tone, gentle as it was, which

made the surgeon feel it would be presumptuous in him to offer any further words of caution, and he left her to visit the other sufferers.

Constance sat still and motionless, unable to realize anything. Gerard was here, she was beside him, but all things of earth seemed to have passed away ; surely they had met in the spirit-land : all was confused and bewildered. And then awoke an intense, overwhelming desire to know if he were ready to enter that spirit-land : and she sent forth from the depths of the heart petitions, exhausting her by their earnestness, that if he were not prepared, time for preparation might be given him.

And so hours wore away. The surgeon paid his visits, and recalled her for a few moments, but she sank back into her dreamlike state when he moved away. Still, not for a moment did she forget that she was watching, and that life and death depended on attending to the slightest appearance of returning animation. Towards morning, as she sat still in the same spot, her hands clasped, her head bowed, and listening intently to the breath that seemed to be drawn with such difficulty, there was a slight movement of one hand, and a sort of sob or groan came from the sick man.

Constance moistened the lips with a feather dipped in the stimulant, and this time it was swallowed. She crept swiftly but noiselessly to the bedroom, and summoned the surgeon. He felt the pulse, put his ear to the chest to listen to the breathing, and then whispered, "He has rallied ; there is not much immediate danger."

"He may recover, then?" Constance asked.

"It is impossible to speak decidedly, but I should conclude, as far as I can judge now, that life could last a few days: I thought at first it would last but a few hours."

Morning came, and no change was perceptible. Constance's worn and exhausted look could not be concealed by daylight, and once more the doctor respectfully recommended that she should take some rest. The word seemed almost a mockery, but she determined to follow his advice in lying down; and, cold and trembling, she sought her own room, and again poured forth all her heart's burden at His feet who alone could understand and comfort her in her sorrow.

The mid-day train was due, and Constance sat in her sitting-room awaiting her uncle's arrival. She had not visited Gerard again. Jane Morton had come to her from the surgeon with a report of all the sufferers, and the information that the gentleman in No. 10 was rather better, and that "he seemed coming to himself," though he had not spoken; "and the doctor said, Ma'am," Jane continued, in an anxious tone, "that he hoped you would please to rest, for he was sure you had done too much."

"Consciousness is returning,—then I must not go to him," Constance thought, and she tried to still her heart's restless throbbing with prayer. But ere many moments were past, wheels were heard rapidly approaching the house, and in another minute her uncle was in her room. She tried to rise to meet him,

but her quivering limbs would not support her, and she sank again on her chair.

"My child, my dear child!" he murmured, as he grasped her hand and sat down beside her; and for some moments neither spoke, and then Constance whispered faintly, "You will go to him?"

"Yes, certainly, if there is no risk: I will see the doctor. Can Symonds shew me the way?" he asked, putting his hand on the bell.

"You will come back to me soon?" Constance said, imploringly: "If he is still unconscious, I may watch beside him again."

Her uncle assured her he would learn all from the doctor, and soon return. He told the doctor that he had known Mr. Aubrey intimately at one period of his life, that he had not seen him for years, and his presence might, from circumstances, be exciting to the invalid; but that if there were no risk, he should be thankful to be permitted to see him.

"I consider it a hopeless case," the doctor answered; "and as consciousness seems to have returned, it would no doubt be a great comfort to him to see one familiar face, and I think it would be needless to debar him of that comfort. I will go in to him again, and if he is able to bear being spoken to, I will tell him that a friend would be glad to see him."

The doctor returned in about ten minutes, and telling Mr. Montrevor that he had prepared the invalid for his visit, conducted him to the room.

Gerard was lying on the bed, with his eyes open,

and his face perfectly colourless; his hands seemed to drop lifelessly by his side, and his whole aspect betokened extreme exhaustion. As Mr. Montrevor walked gently up to the bed, the sad, earnest gaze which Gerard fixed upon him almost unnerved him; he took one of the lifeless hands, and pressed it within his own. Gerard faintly returned the pressure, and asked, in a hollow whisper, "Then I shall die with a friend near me?"

It was no time for concealing his state from him, and Mr. Montrevor did not attempt to alter his conviction that his hours here were few. The great difficulty in breathing made speaking a trying effort to Gerard, but ere long he gasped forth the words, "Was it a blessed vision that haunted me last night, or did I really see"—he paused, and his lips quivered ere he could frame the word—"Constance beside me? Is she dead, and was it her spirit that was near me?"

"No, she is not dead, and she it was who watched beside you through the night: she thought you were quite unconscious."

"And so I was, except at momentary intervals; and then such peace came over me, that I fancied I must have passed beyond this troublous world. But how came she here? I thought the doctor said I was in a hospital."

"You are; but it is a hospital that she has established in her own house."

A smile passed over Gerard's pale features at these words—a smile that effaced for the moment all signs of suffering or exhaustion. "And she is here still?"

he asked, tremulously; "I am under her roof? Oh, strange, oh, most blessed! Shall I see her again?—is it too much to ask. I am dying fast,—I shall soon pass away. If I could see her sit once more beside me, I feel as if I could die in peace." He looked earnestly, anxiously, in Mr. Montrevor's face as he spoke.

He hastened to reply. "Gerard, nothing, I am sure, would be such an unspeakable comfort to Constance, as to be allowed to soothe your dying hours. Shall I bring her to you now? are you equal to seeing her?"

"Yes," he answered, while he gasped for breath: "Is it not all a dream?" His emotion was too much for him, and a deadly faintness came over him: "Shall I die without seeing her?" he murmured, as exhaustion overpowered him.

Mr. Montrevor summoned the doctor; his remedies revived Gerard at last, and he whispered faintly to Mr. Montrevor, "Now—now."

The doctor lingered still beside the bed, but Gerard begged to be alone, and Mr. Montrevor left on his anxious errand.

Constance heard her uncle's step in the passage long before it reached the door, and rose tremblingly to meet him. He told her as calmly as he could Gerard's wish. "I may go to him," she ejaculated, and then murmured low, "My God, I thank Thee." She drew one long, deep breath, closed her eyes, covering them with her hand, and then, with trembling steps, prepared to follow her uncle. He would have offered his arm to support her, but he saw by

the intense emotion depicted on her face, that the slightest word spoken would disturb her, and he moved on noiselessly.

When they reached the door of the room, he paused, for he felt that no eyes but those of their Father in heaven should be on a meeting such as this. He turned to Constance, and said, "I will go in and tell him you are here;" and he left her, and went up to Gerard. "She is here," he whispered gently.

Gerard could not speak, but his lips moved, as if he would fain have entreated to see her instantly. And in a moment Mr. Montrevor was beside Constance: "He is ready," he murmured; and he waited without whilst she entered.

She stood beside him. Words cannot describe such a meeting; they are powerless to tell of the intense, the overwhelming emotions that filled the hearts of both,—the strange gushing memories of the past, the solemn reality of the present.

Few words were spoken. Gerard grasped Constance's hand, as she sank beside the bed, bending her head over his hand. Faintly, and with a great effort, he murmured words of endearment and thankfulness, but she could not speak nor move. At length he whispered low, "Look at me once more, my precious one. Oh, God, I never thought to see that face again. I thank Thee—I thank Thee!"

She tried to be calm, as she raised her sweet, pale face; but it was too much to see the seal of death on his brow, and her head sank again. And for some minutes neither spoke, and then Gerard said, "I have not long to be here; I must speak."

Constance raised her face, and he went on: "Lily, my own darling Lily—I may call you that once more?—I must ask you—though now that I have looked on your face, such words seem almost a form—will you forgive me? I shall feel that I can die in peace when your own lips have told me that you have forgiven me all the suffering I have caused you."

She looked at him imploringly, as if she would ask him not to speak thus, but he continued: "Will you say it now, that I may feel that the past is forgotten, and that you will remember me without pain? Call me Gerard, as of old."

"Gerard," Constance answered, while she looked at him with tearful eyes and quivering lips,—and as she spoke it seemed as if a long pent-up stream flowed again, "You must not ask me to forgive you; I have nothing to forgive. I must have seemed so cruel to you, but I was not, Gerard. Oh, what agonies I went through, and how my heart ached for you! But it seemed to me as if I could not act otherwise; I felt as if my road to happiness was over another's grave, and I feared to tread it, for I could not look up and ask God's blessing upon it."

"You were right, darling; I feel it now. You acted in the fear of God, and He in His mercy has overruled all for my good. Had you become mine, it would have been such intense, such passionate joy, that I *could* not have repented. I should have gained my end,—could I have grieved; how it was attained? I should have driven the past for ever from my mind, and revelled in the present, and cared for nought beyond. And oh, Lily, where should I have awoke

from that dream, had death come to me as suddenly as it has done now?"

He paused, and Constance could not speak,—her heart was too full for words; and after a few moments he went on: "And, thank God, now I do not fear to meet death. Lily, dearest, through Him who died for us, I can depart in peace. I may not speak more now, but if strength is given me, I must tell you how wonderfully God has dealt with me; but I have no strength now. Will you ask your uncle to come to me?"

The words came with a great effort, a pause between each, and Constance looked tremblingly on the deathly paleness that spread over his face, but she moved softly to do his bidding. "You will come back," he whispered; and in a few moments she was kneeling beside his bed, while her uncle's voice uprose in prayer.

Gerard was thoroughly exhausted now; he could speak no more; and was obliged to have the room darkened, and lie in perfect stillness. Constance longed to watch beside him, but her pale, exhausted face frightened her uncle, and he begged her to go and lie down. Gerard heard the whispered entreaty, and said faintly, "You must try to get a little rest."

She left the room, after one long look on that calm face with its closed eyes, and went to her own. Her uncle took her place beside the bed. Gerard lay still and motionless hour after hour. The doctor feared that it might be the stupor which precedes death. But towards night he revived, and took a little nou-

ishment, and then felt able to speak to Mr. Montrevor. After the prayers that followed were over, he expressed his desire to receive the Communion.

There seemed no time to be lost, and Mr. Montrevor went instantly to summon Constance. She was lying down on her sofa, and got up and followed him immediately. Gerard looked up as she entered, as if he wished to speak. She went to him, and he whispered, "Pray that I may find acceptance at the last."

When the solemn rite was ended, Constance took her place as watcher beside the sick-bed.

Gerard lay quite still; there was an expression of perfect peace on his face; for more than an hour he did not speak, but seemed to be holding communion with God. Then he asked Constance to read again the sentences of holy comfort from the Communion-service. As she read them his countenance brightened, as if he heard good news from a far country; and when she ceased reading he murmured, "'I will give you rest.' He has given it to me, Lily; and I feel how great is His mercy, which calls me hence. He knows my weakness, and He has not left me to struggle on long."

He was too weak to say more; he stretched out his hand to clasp hers, and held it in his own.

From time to time he opened his eyes, and fixed them on her face with one of the deep, earnest glances of olden times,—only the eyes had another, a more spiritual light in them,—murmured a word of endearment, then closed his eyes again and lay still: and so the night wore away.

Mr. Montrevor lay down in the next room. He could not find in his heart to urge Constance to leave her post, and it was not till morning dawned that, finding Gerard had sunk into a calm slumber, he begged her to go and take some rest. But Gerard's hand was clasped in hers, and she could not move without disturbing him; and, feeling thankful for this excuse for remaining, she sat on.

Gerard had a long sleep, and awoke apparently much revived. He looked wistfully and anxiously towards the spot where Constance sat, to assure himself that she was really there, and that it was not a dream; but when he noticed the pale face, that was raised with a gentle smile to greet him as he awoke, he felt uneasy, and urged her again to take some rest. "It will be good for me to be alone with your uncle," he murmured: "ask him to say one prayer before you go." And again they knelt beside the bed.

Two days passed away, and still Gerard lingered here. There seemed a slight amendment; the breath was drawn with less difficulty, and sometimes he could speak with more ease. On the evening of the third day, he awoke from one of the refreshing sleeps he now had occasionally, and fixed his eyes calmly and earnestly on Constance, as one might look on some lovely prospect that soothed and refreshed the wearied mind. "Lily," he murmured, "how wonderful is God's mercy; how tender He is; how true that He deals not with us after our deserts! I never thought to look on your face again on earth, and yet He has sent me to you to be soothed and calmed in my dying hours. It had never crossed my mind that such mercy

could be in store. Even now, when I sleep, I awake with the trembling feeling that it must be all a dream."

He paused for some moments, while he drew his breath quickly, and the cold dews of death seemed gathering on his forehead.

Constance looked anxiously at him, fearful that he was doing himself harm in speaking; he understood her expression, and smiled in answer to it, and said, "It does not matter, my Lily: I know my hours are numbered, and I do not think any human skill or precautions can retard the course of the sand that has yet to run out, and I must talk to you this evening. I have so wished to speak, I have so much to tell you. Lily, my life has been a wretched one. Of late I have *known* how wretched, before I only *felt* that it was so; felt that nothing had power to please, that I was weary and dissatisfied, irritated with myself, and in consequence irritated with all others; but I understood not why it was so. A change came, dearest; I must tell you how it was brought about." He paused, and his mind seemed to turn inwards, an expression of pain passed over his face, and after an interval he continued: "I cannot speak of the past,—it is better that I should not. I can only say that at the time when I could madly have risked all to gain you, when life seemed to me not worth possessing if I might not pass it with you, and I thought I had gained you, even then there was not rest. There was joy, wild, delirious joy, but ever behind, in the background, was fear. If you were out of my sight, conscience would speak, and though I fiercely stilled its

voice, yet the agonizing dread would come over me that my treasure might yet be wrested from me.

"The just retribution came: I see it all now; then I impiously rebelled against it, and murmured at the cruelty of the decree that shut me out from bliss." A shudder passed over him as he recalled that season of misery, and he continued, in a feebler tone: "When all was over—when I knew that it was utterly vain to hope, I felt as if I loathed my very existence. I could look on nothing, hear nothing, go nowhere, but that bitter thoughts of the past arose. I thought of Adam, exiled from his paradise of delight, and felt that as it had been for him, so it was for me; the ground brought forth nothing but thorns and thistles, and I determined I would fly from it. I fitted out a yacht, and thought that the deep should henceforth be my home; but I carried everywhere with me my wretched self, and found peace nowhere. I sailed the world over. When the ocean was calm I was restless and impatient, but when the tempest arose, and the waves roared, and the wind drove our little bark madly forward, then I felt a wild excitement that seemed some relief.

"In the spring of this year we had sailed for some days in the Southern Pacific without sight of land, and having been previously becalmed, we were getting short of water, so that it became an object to touch somewhere. One bright summer-day we came in sight of land—a lonely island; we made for it, and towards evening we neared it. It was one of those evenings that always increased my restlessness; there was hardly a ripple on the ocean, or cloud in the sky.

Rather than wait whilst the men rowed to shore, I said I would go with them. As the boat neared the land, I saw the natives assembling, and there seemed a whispered debate among my men on the advisableness of landing. But my weariness of life had given me a recklessness of danger—I gave no heed to their fears, and steered for what appeared a landing-place. Owing to the surf and swell, there was some difficulty in making it, and what was my surprise when I heard the necessary directions shouted out in our native tongue! We landed, and who do you think met my astonished gaze? none other than your cousin Eustace."

He paused, exhausted, and Constance rose, and with a throbbing heart but a steady hand, arranged the cushions under his head, and held a glass of water to his lips.

When he had rested for some moments, and regained breath, he went on, while she sat with clasped hands and earnest eyes, hanging on every word.

"It is no use trying, Lily; I have not strength to tell you of all that he and Harry Sedgeleigh are doing on that island, civilizing and Christianizing the natives. It is a great work, and yet the work he did for me is greater still. When I saw him I could have turned away, made for the boat, and departed: but he came forward with the kindness of a friend and the courtesy of a Christian (I can call it nothing else). The past was forgotten. I was a stranger in a foreign land, where he was at home; he made me welcome. I had intended remaining but a few hours on that island; I staid

weeks. I was drawn towards him in a way I cannot express. He looked much older; there was a manliness, almost a dignity, about him, that made me forget the difference in our ages. Oh, how much I could tell you, had I but breath to speak. But it must suffice to say that here my eyes were opened to the miserable unprofitableness of the life I had led. I seemed to see my whole life spread out as in panoramic views before me, while under each was written, in letters of fire,—Self-indulgence, Self-indulgence! I saw that I had wasted a whole life, neglected all opportunities, forgotten the end of my existence. I know not how this conviction came upon me,—perhaps it was the living contrast of such a life as Eustace's that forced it to my mind. Or might it not have been the answer to prayer? He told me," he murmured low, "that prayer ever ascended to God's throne for me. Yes, Lily, he and you have saved me." He gave her a look of such intense gratitude, that she could only hide her eyes and weep.

When, after another pause, he resumed his history, he said: "I could have staid on that island, and ended my days there; for there I had found a peace such as I had never known or imagined before. But Eustace made me see that my duty lay not there: he called to my mind my long-neglected estate, my idle shrinking from the duties its possession involved. So at last, with (thank God!) a resolute will, I turned my thoughts homewards. At one time, Lily—I will not deny it—visions of earthly happiness arose, and I had well-nigh made shipwreck of my lately-won peace, in the tumult that these dreams of joy caused in my

soul. But Eustace urged me to check them, and, thank God! I had strength to stifle them, and to follow the path of duty. How thankful I am for that testing now, when I have no means of proving the sincerity of my repentance and love to God, words cannot say.

"But I must finish my history. I left that island, which had been the scene of the most important crisis of my life. Eustace accompanied me to the ship, we bade each other farewell, and I looked my last upon it. We set sail, had fair weather, and a prosperous voyage home. What a different voyage it was to me from any I had made before! All things seemed changed. I landed at Southampton, and after making arrangements for the crew, I took the train and set off on that journey which was to lead me where I little expected,—to the valley of the shadow of death. And now, Lily, my tale is told; and as I dwell upon it, it seems to me as if I had only really *lived* during the last few months: all the rest seems to me now but as the idle games of a child playing on the edge of a yawning precipice, or the wild delirium of a fevered mind. He only lives, who lives for the end for which God created him."

He ceased speaking, and again she held the water to his burning lips; he drank some eagerly, and whispered, "I have more to say; you must not leave me."

She sat still, he lay with closed eyes, while his chest heaved with the labour of drawing breath. There were thoughts of thankfulness in her heart too deep for utterance: words could not have ex-

pressed them. But they needed not words to wing their way to heaven.

It was some time before Gerard spoke again; once or twice his lips moved, but no words were uttered. Constance leant forward to catch the slightest sound, and at last the words came forth, "Clara, poor Clara! did she forgive me, and did she find peace?"

"Yes, Gerard," Constance answered, in a gentle, soothing tone; "I have longed to tell you, but I feared to speak of her: she was so very happy. She prayed hourly for you. She told me our prayers would be answered—that I might live to see the answer; but I was faint-hearted, and I hardly dared to hope."

"In heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage," he murmured: "through God's mercy in Christ we may all meet there."

They were Clara's thoughts too, and how vividly, as but a scene of yesterday, the memory of her death-bed flashed across Constance's mind. And all, beyond what she had ever dared to ask, had been given, for she had been permitted to soothe his dying hours.

In a few moments Gerard said, while he pressed the hand he held in his, "You will give me a place in your quiet little churchyard at Elvanlees, will you not, my Lily? I should like to lie there. There is a comfort in feeling that this earthly tabernacle may be laid where yours too will rest when life is over."

Constance could not answer; it was a great struggle to repress the longing that that rest might come now for her also. But Gerard understood the meaning of that mute, uplifted face, with its quivering lips and tearful eyes.

He lay quite still, for he felt that he had strength for nothing more; Constance sat motionless beside him.

An hour of this solemn stillness passed, and then he said, in his own natural voice, clearly and distinctly, "I am so happy; I think I shall sleep. Good-night, darling;" and he closed his eyes, and seemed to sleep. But ere long he spoke again; it was with an effort now, and as if his mind were wandering: "You will not be long, will you, Lily? I shall wait for you. It is very lovely on this mountain-top." And then the eyelids drooped, and he lay as if asleep; but again the eyes unclosed, he looked upon Constance with a smile so full of joy, it made her tremble—it was too bright for earth—and murmured, "God bless you, my precious one!" and then, with her hand clasped in his, he fell asleep.

He slept calmly and softly as a child, while Constance sat holding her breath, and gazing with trembling intentness on his face.

Presently the hand that held hers relaxed its hold, the fingers grew cold, the breathing became fainter and fainter,—it ceased: the freed spirit had fled away to its rest.

Constance did not weep, she did not pray; she sank on her knees beside the bed,—her spirit seemed to travel, too, to that mountain-top.

One calm, still November day, the lodge-gates at Elvanlees were thrown open, as if in expectation of an arrival; and soon a hearse drew near, and, followed by a mourning-coach, moved slowly along the

approach to the house. Constance Montrevor had come home once more. Clearly and distinctly fell on the ear, like a minute-gun, the solemn sound of the tolling bell. It was a mysterious welcome home, but Constance's heart owned that all was well.

The service was over. Gerard slept in peace. There was another hallowed spot in that churchyard for Constance now. On the evening of that day she knelt alone in the quiet little church, where she had knelt in childhood's sunny morning, in girlhood's joyous day. The bright DAWN had passed, the solemn stillness of TWILIGHT had come upon her; but her inmost soul had proved the truth of the blessed promise, "that at evening-time it shall be light,"—a light "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."



11

12

13

14

